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DIAMOND DICK, The Dandy from Denver.

A TRUE STORY OF THE MINES OF NEW MEXICO.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DARK DASHWOOD," "WILD WILL, THE MAD RANCHERO," "KIT CARSON, JR.," ETC., ETC., ETC.



"PARDS, MY BULLET DREW THE CORK, SO DON'T LET THE CHAMPAGNE WASTE," SAID DIAMOND DICK, PLACIDLY.

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A True Story of the Mines of New Mexico.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM,"

(MAJOR SAM. S. HALL.)

AUTHOR OF "KIT CARSON, JR.," "WILD WILL,"
"THE BLACK BRAVO," "THE TERRIBLE
TONKAWAY," "THE LONE STAR
GAMBLER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WELL MET.

"THER'S a naked, bald-headed lial I asser-wates hit; an' I 'kin back my lingo, which air 'suar' Nited States."

"I warn't a-speakin' ter yeou, stranger; an' I ain't in a condish fer pickin' triggers er handlin' a slasher. 'Sides thet, my six air shoved up for whisk."

"What's yer handle?"

"Jim Jams!"

"An' yer says yer knows whar thar's pocket gold within ten mile o' Big Med'cin' City?"

"Thet's what I said, an' I spit hit out plain."

"An' yer heerd my say-so?"

"Ya-as!"

"An' yer don't 'low ter take hit up?"

"Nary onc't—I hain't got ther dust ter pay fer a coffin, an' I'm inclined ter think that one squar' knock on the ribs 'ud send me 'over ther range' on ther whiz."

"Yer a feeble infant air ye? Coppers burnt out! Git chuck-full every night, an' then go an' snatch a few winks in a ole shaft with yer huffs in ther drink?"

"Thet's 'bout ther way to put hit, pard; an' I'm so dang'd nigh gone thet I doesn't mind what's spit at me—I'm a loose link in ther chain, an' li'ble ter drap off mos' any time."

"Reckon ye're 'bout kerrect—sleepin' in a ole shaft air calkerlated ter give a pilgrim a cough what mought be consintrated on ther breethin' mersheenery, an' culmernate in chronic corn-sumption, which air about ther cussedest kind o' disease what could corral a human crittur. Thet's solid, Jim Jams, or I'm a condemn'd kiute. I war kinder inclined ter cause yer ter levant off on yer ear, but hit wouldn't be quite kerrect ter hit yer in ther ribs. Let's kerral 'bout four fingers o' Prussic acid; mebbe so hit'll wash thet lie down."

"By ther grim Moses, thet'll fit me ter a charm! What's yer cog', pard?"

"I'm gin'rally called Bowlder Bill down Santa Fe way. Hyer, boss! gi'n us ther best whisk 'yer got in Placer Palace."

The conversation recorded passed between two men as different from each other in appearance as could be imagined, if we except the apparel.

Bowlder Bill was a big, broad-shouldered, burly fellow, dressed in rough miner's costume; red shirt, coarse pantaloons tucked into the tops of cow-hide boots, and a greasy slouch hat. He carried the usual arms—a bowie-knife and a Colt's revolver buckled about his waist.

Jim Jams was small in stature, thin to emaciation, and pale as a corpse. His clothing resembled Bowlder Bill's, except that it was worn and ragged, and his belt was *minus* the arms.

These two men, as their conversation indicated, had met for the first time. Bill had made ready use of the words which commence our narrative, upon overhearing Jim Jams asser to the bar-keeper that he knew of pocket-gold deposits within ten miles of the town.

Placer Palace was claimed to be the best hotel in Big Medicine City, but the principal accommodations consisted of but four rooms, which were over the bar and gambling room, the last named being back of the former, in fact, both in one.

The city itself was a newly-located mining town of some forty shanties, and was about twenty miles from Taos, New Mexico.

Bowlder Bill had been drinking heavy—this was evident—and had arrived at that stage of intoxication which caused him to use the strongest and most insulting language, and whether he was man enough to back his words could not be decided, although from his trying to pick a quarrel with a man two-thirds dead, as Jim Jams appeared to be, the indications were pretty strong that he was somewhat of a coward.

That Jim Jams was a regular bar-room bummer was plain enough, for he had been seated, half-asleep, for the last hour upon a bench, and had roused himself to study up some plan by which he could get the drink that was so necessary to hold his mind on the borders of a sane condition.

Springing to his feet, as an idea flashed through his boozy brain, he had staggered across the floor and, in an important manner, had announced to the bar-keeper, in a low

voice and what he wished to be considered a confidential way, the discovery which he professed to have made. This important piece of intelligence could not fail, he thought, to have a startling effect upon the vender of "bug-juice," and induce him to treat. Bowlder Bill, however, had overheard the remark, and "put in his oar," as we have recorded.

The bar-keeper—Taos Tim, so called—knew that Jim Jams had not been a mile from Big Medicine City in three months, and the words of the poor sot merely went in one ear and out of the other; but when Bowlder Bill interrupted with his insulting remark, Taos Tim, although he said nothing, was as mad as a scorched "rattler," and made up his mind if the burly miner laid a hand on Jim Jams he'd put a Comstock funnel through his anatomy.

Thus matters stood when Bowlder Bill ordered the drinks.

With the exception of the three characters mentioned, the bar was deserted. But half a dozen tables in the rear part of the building were crowded with the variously attired people of the plains and men of the mountains; among whom were miners, cow-boys, speculators, rancheros and teamsters, Europeans, Americans and Mexicanos. But this was some sixty feet distant from the bar.

All were so intent upon the games of monte, faro and roulette, that it must be a noisy clamor indeed which could draw their attention; but when once their minds were attracted to anything more exciting than the fast flipping cards, or the rattle of the marbles that so seldom "struck" the "eagle-bird," they were as one man moved here and there by their passions or emotions—a resistless mob, to whom excitement was as necessary as food and drink.

Taos Tim passed a bottle to Jim Jams, and a glass to each, meanwhile eying Bowlder Bill with a suspicious glance.

"Does yer call that a squar' deal, pard?" asked the miner, with an indignant look at Taos Tim.

"What do you have reference to?"

"Why, shovin' ther whisk' ter that pilgrim fust off. Ain't I slingin' ther dust fer this hyer 'pison'?"

"Well, I presume you intend to do so, but I took you for a gentleman"—this, with something of sarcasm—"and a gentleman who treats a friend always passes the bottle to his pard before he pours out his own liquid refreshments. I saved you the trouble, and you ought to thank me."

It was evident that Bill could not exactly take in and digest the words of Taos Tim, and arrive at any positive conclusion whether the bar-keeper was favorably disposed toward him or not; but by his looks and manner the bully felt that, in the event of his getting into any personal difficulty, the man behind the bar would be "dead ag'in' him."

Jim Jams, who, by the way, seemed to have been very appropriately named, poured out his glass full to the brim, and Bill, noticing this, and also that the bar-keeper made no remonstrance, knew that his picked-up and broken-down pard was respected in the establishment, notwithstanding his poverty and wretched condition. He therefore decided that he had made a mistake in more ways than one, by insulting the wreck of a man with whom he clicked glasses.

"Hyer's hopin' yer lungs 'll heal up, pard, an' that yer'll strike pocket-gold within ten mile o' Big Med'cin' City, fer I knows yer hain't got strength ter pick at quartz er papsand."

"I'd like mighty well ter scoop in 'nuff ter bury me decent, an' sock up a head-stone. But hyer's another nail in my coffin!"

Jim Jams raised his glass with both trembling hands, spilling some of the liquor, notwithstanding this precaution.

"Hit's a cough what's goin' ter flop yer inter yer coffin, pard. Ha! ha! ha!" and tossing a gold eagle on the bar, Bowlder Bill drew his sleeve across his bearded lips, gave an upward pull to his belt on each side, then gathered up his change, throwing back a quarter, as he did so, and saying:

"Cigars fer two! Reckon we doesn't often git ter smoke anythin' but a corn-cob er a shuck cigarette, an' when we does, we'll kerral ther pure quill."

Igniting their cigars, the two men stood looking at each other intently, as if this last drink had cleared their eyes and brain, as indeed it had, and they wished to study, each his new friend's character.

Both, swaying like saplings moved in a gentle breeze, gazed into each other's eyes for a moment, and then Bowlder Bill extended his hand, saying frankly:

"Shake, pard! Reckon ye're white."

This act and speech seemed to influence Taos Tim favorably toward the burly miner, and as he dexterously wiped out the glasses, he looked curiously at Bill and asked:

"Are you a stranger in this section?"

"Ya-as. I'm down from ther range. Never crossed ther Col'rado line. Bin meanderin' from Port Yuma ter Tucson; from thar ter El Paso, an' up ter Santa Fe. Down an' up ag'in

hit has bin fer some consid'able periods, but I never hev raked in extry dust enough ter skute back ter ther States in style."

"How long a time have you been in this burg, if I'm not too inquisitive?"

"Jist 'roved ter-day. Don't keer 'bout yer bein' 'quisitive et all. I'm out an' out white, with a clean trail, an' I air a-feelin' bad coz I lit down on Jim Jams heavy. I war purty nigh blind with forty-rod lightnin', what I poured down 'fore I struck up street. I war in at ther "Quartz Queen," an' I didn't know Jim Jams war a sick pilgrim, though I thought he looked kinder skim-milkish. I cut round Taos, an' purspected fer ten mile 'bove hyer, an' I know mighty well thar ain't no show up ther range fer pay-dirt, pocket-gold, er yaller quartz, 'ceptin' right hyer at Big Med'cin' City."

"That was only an idea of Jim Jams, born of drink," said Taos Tim, smiling, he evidently having changed his mind as to the character of Bill. "He thinks, however, that it is a dead sure thing, and is dreaming about it now, I reckon. Poor fellow! he only rakes in the nuggets in his imagination, but they do him just as much good in that way, for it would all go here and in yonder, if he owned the Comstock mine."

Bowlder Bill cast a glance over his shoulder, for he was leaning upon the bar.

Jim Jams was again seated on the bench sound asleep, his head thrown back, and his emaciated features, showing traces of manly beauty, now marred by disease and dissipation.

"He doesn't 'pear like he war low-born, ef he does war rags an' sling hashed lingo."

"Why, man, he used to wear boiled shirts and a plug hat! He was a slam-up gentleman when he struck ther range, and had plenty of dust, but he went through it all. He used good language in those days, but he has dropped it since he got reduced to what you see him."

"Yer doesn't say!"

"Fact!" and Taos Tim tossed off the cocktail he had been mixing with great care.

Bowlder Bill walked to the bench, seated himself and gazed with interest upon the face of Jim Jams.

At this moment a heavy-built man, of great muscular strength, and at least a head taller than Bowlder Bill, walked hastily from the crowded gaming tables up to the bar, brought his fist down upon the counter with a bang, and called out:

"Bu'sted, by Christopher! Gimme a drink o' double-distilled damnation!"

Swallowing the liquor at a single gulp, the new-comer turned about, leaning his back against the bar, and with an ugly scowl upon his rough-bearded face, and his black eyes flashing from beneath beetling brows that met and mingled over a red sun-burned nose.

He looked straight ahead at the slabs that formed the side of the building, seeming oblivious of the presence of the two men on the bench, and indulged in soliloquy which he no doubt wished to be overheard and noted:

"I'd like danged well ter know if ther cuss run in a cold deck on me! If I war sure, I'd either put as many holes in him as there is in a perforated plaster, or start a lynx picnic on him. Homsomever, thar's more'n Pueblo Pete gut tuck in. I reckon I'll hev ter corn-solerdade with some tender-foot, puttin' my cheek an' fightin' qualities ag'in' his capital. Wish'd I'd 'a' stayed in Utah!"

Lowering his voice now, to prevent his words being overheard, the huge borderer continued:

"Wonder when ther cap'n 'll rove, an' make a break fer this hyer burg? Reckon he'll hev ter shove some duster inter my pouch 'fore I gi'n him this billy-doo what I gut outen ther Taos post-office."

So saying, Pueblo Pete, as he designated himself, pulled a letter from his pouch, and slowly spelled out to himself the superscription:—

"G-e-o-r-g-e H-o-l-b-r-o-o-k!"

"Reckon thet air his right handle, an' I hes ther deal on him, ef I wants ter take a hand in a sly game. He must 'a' bin raised whar ther letter comes from, an' hit's post-marked

"O-g-d-e-n-s-b-u-r-g, N-e-w Y-c-r-k!"

"He air a boss pard fer a flat-broke pilgrim; I'm a-bettin' on that! Dog-gone—"

The soliloquy of Pueblo Pete was here interrupted by the sudden appearance around the screen, which stood opposite the street entrance of Placer Palace, of a young man, the sight of whom caused the occupants of the bar to hold their breath in the utmost astonishment.

CHAPTER II.

A RETROSPECT.

WE would now call the reader's attention from the wilds of the Rocky Mountains to the beautifully situated and thriving city of Ogdenburg, on the verdant banks of the St. Lawrence river.

Upon an elevation above the business portion of the town, and situated on one of the side streets in the suburbs, stands a fine old-fashioned mansion from the veranda of which, and also from many of its windows, can be had an extended view of the noble river that some forty miles nearer Ontario's Lake, ripples lovingly or

* George McCallan, a living character of to-day.
—AUTHOR.

dashes madly around the grass-fringed banks of the Thousand Islands.

The town of Prescott opposite, on the Canada side, is also in plain view; and no more pleasant location for a summer home can be found on the American continent.

A beautiful flower-garden, laid out in great taste and showing the constant care of female hands, extends from the porch down a gentle decline to the ornamental fence which separates the grounds from the public street.

Some ten acres of land is included in the space within which the mansion stands; and this is mostly filled with ancient apple trees, although near the dwelling, and in the rear of the same, is an orchard containing pears and various other fruits. In short, peace, quiet, comfort and refinement are indicated, although the place is situated within the limits of a considerable city.

Some three months previous to the events that are recorded in our first chapter, two ladies, one middle-aged the other quite old, sat on the veranda of which we have spoken. They were slowly rocking back and forth in those roomy, old-fashioned chairs so common in Yankee-land, both occupied with their knitting, and the older of the two occasionally glancing at her companion in apparent solicitude if not anxiety.

The younger lady had the appearance of one who was suffering in mind; and the same to some degree affected her companion, but in the latter it was seemingly suppressed on her account.

The one was about forty-five years of age, and still attractive in face and form; the other was apparently four-score, small in stature, and quite attenuated, but her dark, flashing and piercing eyes, and nervous motion had yet not a little of the fire of youth.

"Mary McClellan," at last spoke the old lady, in an impatient tone of voice, glancing up from her work as she did so, "you are worrying yourself almost to death. You do not act naturally of late. What has happened cannot now be remedied, and we must bow to the will of God."

"I fully realize that it is as you say," replied the lady addressed as Mary McClellan, but I cannot control my thoughts, or my grief."

She dropped her hands heavily on her lap, and continued in an earnest manner, bending toward her companion as she spoke, emphatically:

"Mother! Agnes Corleise McClellan! Do you suppose that a family was overwhelmed by disgrace and death in so short a time before since this world was first created, unless death came in the form of some terrible accident? Do you suppose that any woman was ever called upon to suffer such anguish of mind through the perfidy of her husband, and then, within two short weeks, have the grave claim her three, her only children? Do you wonder that it sent her, as it did, to an insane asylum, and then to her grave? Oh, how I detest that name of Holbrook! Henceforth, when I speak of my dead sister, I'll call her simply Katharine."

"It was indeed terrible, Mary," returned the aged woman; "but God's ways are not as our ways. I shall soon join my daughter Katharine and her children. But I never trust myself to think of the near past. If I did I should be miserable, and it is wrong to regret those who have gone before us."

"But does it not seem to you, mother, that that female fiend, Lucile Luzerne, who entered my sister's family to destroy them, must have been leagued with the Evil One?"

"I only know, Mary," was the quiet reply, "that she was a very beautiful woman, one with whom men could rarely fail to be infatuated, and that she had a heart incapable of feeling. But, sooner or later, retribution will overtake her. When you speak of that woman, Mary, you excite me. Pray do not repeat it. I have to repent, often and often, of my revengeful feelings."

"I cannot avoid speaking of the terrible past. I think of it by day, and dream of it by night. I know it is wicked, but I find myself calling down curses upon George Holbrook and Lucile Luzerne, who tortured my darling sister to insanity and death, and then caused her three innocent children to die so young—Heaven knows by what means! Poor little Frankie was but seven, and Stella an infant. Mother, I really and truly believe that Katharine and her children were poisoned!"

Grandmother McClellan dropped her knitting and looked with horror into the eyes of her daughter.

"Now you mention your suspicions, Mary," she said, in a husky voice, "I am astonished. These same thoughts have flashed through my mind more than once of late. Do you know if anything suspicious was found in the house?"

"Not that I am aware of. Be assured she would remove all traces of that kind. But where do you imagine the wretches have fled to?"

"They are somewhere in the far Western wilds, I presume. But I wish my boy George would return. He has not written in some months."

"He is hunting and fishing in the woods of

Maine. Oh, mother! what will he say when he hears of all this disgrace and death? I feel almost certain that when he knows the facts he will follow that wretch Holbrook to the ends of the earth, and shoot him down like a dog!"

"I know well what his energy and temper are," said the mother; "but he is only a boy—my baby, as I call him. I fear he will never again be contented at home; he was always disposed to be wayward and wandering. On all these long expeditions that he has taken, he has occupied himself with other things besides hunting and fishing. He has kept up his favorite study of botany, and I am sure has gathered a great deal of information in regard to the medicinal uses of herbs."

There was a tone that denoted no little pride in her son, in the old lady's voice; but she resumed her knitting, and soon the conversation drifted from their common grief entirely to the discussion of the absent and evidently favorite one.

"I feel assured," said the younger lady, "that George's self-confidence, which has always, as he says, carried him through tight places, will bring him success in life. You remember how he won the great snow-shoe or racket race from Malone across country to St. Regis, and carried away the prize at the skating tournament on Black Lake? I almost believe he has assurance enough to sign a contract to remove the Thousand Islands from the St. Lawrence to Lake Champlain. 'Nothing venture, nothing win,' he says. I hope the dear fellow may succeed. We have had our full share of misery, God knows!"

As Mary McClellan spoke, she rose hastily to meet a boy who advanced with a telegram.

"Please read this," he said, "and ascertain if you need to send an answer."

Tearing the envelope open in a nervous manner, the old lady scanned the message, and then, with a joyous, radiant expression on her aged face, replied:

"Thanks. There is no answer."

Quietly she resumed her seat, remarking to her daughter as she did so:

"You may lay aside your sewing and your fears together, Mary: there is some good news at last. George is coming home. He has telegraphed from Lawrence, and will be here within an hour!"

CHAPTER III.

MET HIS MATCH.

THE occupants of Placer Palace bar gazed at the new arrival in wonder and amazement, and well they might for the young man would have claimed and received the attention, if not the admiration, of any crowd, even in a more civilized part of the world.

His buckskin suit was of the finest quality and make, the breeches being fringed on the outer seams, besides having a row of two and a half dollar pieces extending closely down, and serving as buttons. Upon his head rested in jaunty style a wide-brimmed sombrero of soft felt, and his well-formed feet were intased in fancy French boots with high legs, into which his breeches were tucked. On the heels of these boots were buckled a pair of richly engraved Mexican spurs. An embossed belt, also stamped in the peculiar and highly ornamental workmanship of the Mexicans with a huge clasp of silver, supported a pair of Colt's army six-shooters and a bowie-knife; and these last were mounted in gold.

A diamond of large size and great brilliancy glittered from the center of the square knot in his neckerchief, and he carried in his hand a costly riding-whip.

The face of the new-comer was bright and winning, besides being boyish; indeed he did not seem to be over eighteen years of age, although at least five feet, ten inches in height and symmetrically formed, seeming fully developed physically.

Fair of complexion, with mild blue eyes, and flaxen hair which hung below his shoulders, but for his height and movements, he might well have been taken for a woman in disguise.

He entered the bar as though he were on a mission of life and death, as far as his actions went; but his cheerful face showed that such was not the case.

Touching his hat politely to the bar-keeper, he strode quickly around the burly form of Pueblo Pete, and smilingly pointing to the bottles behind the bar, said in a careless tone:

"Piper Heidsieck!"

So dazed was Pueblo Pete by the appearance of the dashing stranger that he looked at him with open mouth, forgetting the letter in his hand, at which the youth cast a quick glance.

A light flush flew over his face, and a look of surprise blended with satisfaction came into his eyes.

Although Pete was too intoxicated to notice the slight emotion of the stranger, he at once returned the letter to his pouch, and resumed his former position, with his back against the bar, feigning to be unconscious of the presence of the late arrival.

Taos Tim, whose eyes had been riveted upon

the new-comer was more embarrassed than was usual with him, when the unexpected order broke on his ear. Hastily he opened the bottle.

"Two glasses—you and myself," said the stranger, tapping the bar lightly with his whip.

"Here's another gentleman who will perhaps join us," he said, feigning to have observed Pueblo Pete for the first time; "and there are two more. Give us another bottle."

So saying he beckoned to Bowlder Bill, and made a gesture indicating that he wished the latter to awaken his pard.

In a moment after, all four men stood at the bar; Jim Jams, winking, blinking, and trembling, filled with agreeable surprise at the high-toned drink that awaited him.

Again the glasses were filled, and the stranger tossing a "slug," or fifty-dollar gold piece upon the counter, looked toward the rear apartment and the crowd of gamblers, a score or more of whom were now approaching the bar, drawn there by a sight of the new arrival.

Every eye of the advancing gamblers was fixed in astonishment upon the young stranger at the bar, who seemed unconscious of their scrutiny.

As the crowd halted together some five feet from the end of the counter the bar-keeper, passed the change, thirty dollars, into the hand of his customer.

Neither Pueblo Pete, Bowlder Bill, Jim Jams, or Taos Tim spoke a word. The crowd imitated them; and naught broke the silence, except the murmur of the betters and the flipping of checks in the distance—even the bar-keeper postponing the washing of glasses. Never before had the denizens of Big Medicine City, or at least the frequenters of Placer Palace, been so impressed by the dress and appearance of a stranger.

The silence, which the young man did not appear to notice was broken at length by Jim Jams, who, with drunken importance, pretending to recognize the new arrival, stepped forward and held out his hand, exclaiming, with an attempted expression of pleased surprise:

"By ther grim Moses, Dick, how air you?"

With a smile, the youth took the proffered hand, and replied carelessly:

"How-de do, my friend? You appear ill. Hadn't you better take another drink?"

"Not yit," replied Jim Jams, in an important tone of voice, much pleased at being recognized; "Tim, is thar a leetle o' thet champagne left?"

"Yes," replied the bar-keeper; "about a glassful." And he passed the bottle in question to his seedy customer.

"Pard," said the latter, respectfully, "will you take off yer sombrero an' bend yer head a leetle? I'm goin' ter christen yer."

Laughing lightly, the young man removed his hat, and bent forward.

"Whar yer from last?" inquired Jim Jams, while the crowd looked on with increased wonder.

"Denver," was the careless reply.

"Wa-al, boyees," called out the poor old sot, in a loud voice; "I hyer christen my new pard, who air a gentleman o' ther XXX sort, 'Diamond Dick!' Low me, gents, ter interduce yer, one an' all, ter ther dandy from Denver, Diamond Dick."

"Drinks for the crowd!" called out the newly-named infant, replacing his sombrero, whirling quickly in his tracks, and gracefully cutting the air with his whip as he walked back and forth opposite the bar.

A rousing round of cheers followed the introduction and the order, but it seemed not to affect the person for whom the honor was intended in the least.

The cheering caused the gaming-tables to be deserted, and the space from the end of the bar for some distance back became a perfect jam of surprised humans.

Such a character had never before been seen on the border. His youthful and somewhat feminine appearance impressed the miners more than aught else. At this moment, however, an Indian, somewhat fancifully attired in the peculiar manner of his people, with a Navajo blanket of many colors on his arm, walked quietly around the screen into the room, and Pueblo Pete sprung at once toward the brave, twisting his fingers in the warrior's head-dress of eagle-feathers, saying:

"Dog-goned ef hyer ain't a ginewine scalpin' Injun, an' I'll mop ther floor with his carkiss! What's a-comin' nex? We'll hev a XXX circus directly!"

"You'll have a circus right now, my friend," said Diamond Dick, snapping his whip in the face of Pueblo Pete, "if you don't let that Indian pass. He wasn't interfering with you, and I judge you weigh about fifty pounds more than he does."

"That's a double-distilled, bald-headed lie!"

These words had barely left the lips of Pueblo Pete, who clapped his hand on his revolver as he spoke, when the left leg of Diamond Dick flew upward with the velocity of lightning. There was a sounding whack as his foot struck the side of the gigantic borderer's head, and he fell to the floor with such violence as to shake the building.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF ON THE TRAIL.

"THANK Heaven!" exclaimed grandmother, as she read again the telegram she had received; "my prayers are answered. My great, tall, overgrown baby is coming to see his old grandmother. Mary, we must turn the house inside out, and kill the fatted calf. Hear what the boy says: 'Hearty as a buck. Be home on 11.30 train. You need not meet me. Will take a hack.'"

Both ladies now entered the mansion, and proceeded to their labor of love; the elder childishly changing the arrangements of the younger to suit her own taste, without a word of remonstrance, and both overjoyed at the anticipated arrival of the young man, who, it was plain to be seen, was greatly beloved.

In the midst of the hurried preparations, Mrs. McClellan suddenly turned around and exclaimed:

"Mother, where is Allecha?"

"I think she is gathering flowers in the old apple-orchard."

"Won't you please call her? She will be overjoyed at the news."

"Bless her heart! so she will; and she would have been provoked if we had not thought of telling her." And the old lady went out with as light a step as that of a young girl, and in a few moments returned.

"Did she answer, mother?"

"Yes; she will be here in a minute. She has some beautiful flowers which will improve the appearance of the table very much."

As the old lady spoke, a girl of some fourteen summers, and of striking beauty, came running into the dining-room, her cheeks aglow with exercise.

Wavy ringlets of flaxen hue, that in certain shades seemed to be threads of gold, flowed free and abundant over her shoulders, and to her waist. Her skin was fair and her form light and graceful. Her movements were like those of a fawn, and her light blue eyes were filled with a questioning surprise as she observed the excited manner and joyous faces of her mother and grandmother.

"Allecha," said the former, with a loving smile, "George is coming home. We have had a telegram, and he will be here shortly. Please help grandma to arrange those flowers."

"Good! Good!" burst from the lips of the maiden. "I never was so glad in my life. Now, grandma, I think it was real mean in you not to tell me what you wanted." And, with a perfectly radiant face, the girl walked around the room gleefully.

"I was afraid you would break your neck running against an apple-tree, or else that you would throw down the flowers and dance upon them. Have you seen Allie and Charley?"

"I haven't seen them since about nine o'clock this morning, for the very good reason that young Sheppy came along with his team and invited them to go on a fishing excursion. It is useless to tell you that they went, for you know, grandma, they would both of them rather sit upon an old raft and pull up hornpouts, or wade along shore and troll for pickerel, than go to a play or picnic. Oh, what a surprise it will be for the little scamps to find brother George at home again!"

Singing merrily, Allecha McClellan ran through the hall to the porch and gazed down the street in impatient expectation.

Soon the rattle of wheels drew the attention of the ladies, and both rushed out upon the veranda as a hack drew up at the gate.

The driver alighted, opened the door, and a young man sprang quickly to the sidewalk and glanced toward the house, his face beaming with boyish pleasure.

He was tall, strongly and symmetrically built, and, although but eighteen years of age, finely developed, and with a physique that would anywhere attract attention.

That he was agile, and full of fire and vim, was plain to be seen in every movement.

In hair, eyes, features and complexion the resemblance between him and Allecha was so marked as at once to proclaim them brother and sister.

He carried a slender gold-headed cane and was attired in the height of the prevailing fashion—some would say even flashily; a heavy golden chain was attached to a watch of the same precious metal, while a diamond of moderate size and rare brilliancy glittered from the knotted scarf at his throat.

A few brisk paces brought the youth to the steps where the ladies awaited him.

"Mother! Grandmother! I am overjoyed to see you both, and glad indeed to cross once more the threshold of the old home."

"George," said his mother, as the trio passed into the cottage, "you cannot imagine how pleased and relieved in mind we are to have you return to us. We were speaking of you, and wishing from the inmost recesses of our hearts that you would come back when your telegram came. How well and hearty you are looking, too!"

"You great big baby," said the little old lady, looking up at her tall grandson—she seeming but a child in stature compared with him—"I

have actually been pining away with the deep concern I have had, thinking I might perhaps never see you again."

"Pining away is good!" he returned, with a pleasant laugh. "Why, grandmother, you never were larger than some girls of a dozen years. We'll have to attend to this thing; for, if you have pined away on my unworthy account during my short absence, I am thinking if I should be away a year or two on a stretch, there would not be much left of you." Both the ladies joined in the laugh with which he said this, but the grandmother retorted:

"There are sometimes very powerful medicines inclosed in small packages. But don't say that you are going away to be gone so long again, George; or you will dash cold water on all our happiness now."

"When you talk about medicine, grandmother, you interest me. I have learned much in regard to the herbal remedies of the northern woods since I saw you last. Don't fret, however, about my going away again, but wait until the time comes. By the way, where is Allecha?"

"In the garden, George; she has gone to get some fruit for you. She has been dancing and laughing ever since she heard you were coming."

At this moment, with a cry of joy, Allecha sprang from the broad stone step into her brother's arms.

"Oh, George!" she exclaimed, "you will not stay away from us so long again, will you? You are going to remain at home ever so long, this time, are you not?"

"I promise myself jolly times with you all, Allecha," was the reply. "We must go and make aunt Katharine a visit, and the little ones—my favorites, Georgie and Frank. I have presents for you and them in my trunks, which are still at the depot. But, I say, mother, I'm as hungry as a wolf, and without any ceremony will seat myself for dinner."

During the latter portion of George McClellan's remarks, he was putting a towel to good use after a face bath, and did not notice the deathly pallor that overspread the faces of those who were so lovingly watching his every movement. Their emotions were too agonizing for any expression in speech.

Seating himself at the table, George helped the ladies to the viands before him, they striving all the while, by movement and expression, to throw off the oppressive thoughts which the remarks of their loved one had brought forward.

The hunger consequent upon the long journey prevented the young man from noticing the sudden change in the looks and actions of his relatives; for he proceeded to partake of the tempting variety of food before him, with a gusto born of health and hunger, and without allowing himself to keep up a conversation to the discomfort of his digestion, or interference with his appetite.

His grandmother, mother and sister went on to inform him of many trivial circumstances that had occurred during his absence, which called for no reply from him; and they kept up a pretense of eating, though their feelings and thoughts prevented its being more than that.

Having satisfied his stomach, George noticed that the ladies, judging from the contents of their plates had eaten nothing, and he asked in surprise, as he placed his napkin in its ring:

"Had you been to dinner before I arrived, good people?"

"No, George," was the hesitating reply.

"Then, why do you not eat something? I hope my coming has not taken away every one's appetite."

Turning around in his chair, the young man glanced uneasily at each one in their turn, and saw the change in every countenance before him.

"What has come over you all? Why do you look so strangely?" he continued.

"We have bad news for you, George—terrible news," said his mother, her lips trembling and the tears starting to her eyes; while the old lady hid her face, and Allecha bent her head, weeping spasmodically. "We have news that we dread to tell you, but it must be told."

"What is it you have to disclose that has such a depressing effect upon you all? What is it, mother?" As he spoke a shadow passed over his hitherto joyous face.

"Your aunt Katharine—"

A choking sob prevented Mrs. McClellan from proceeding further.

"Well! What of her? Is she ill?"

"She is—dead!"

George McClellan sprang to his feet, intense amazement and poignant grief bordering on anguish stamped on his face.

His mother continued:

"She had a baby—little Stella—that you never saw. She is dead, too. And Georgie and Frank—both have gone! They are dead, my son—all dead!"

George McClellan grasped the back of the chair upon which he had a moment previous been seated, and the wood-work cracked in his grasp; while his fair face, as the terrible facts were proclaimed by his mother with trembling

lips and ghastly features—she sinking to the floor in a dead faint when she had uttered them—became so contorted and darkened that his grandmother covered her eyes with her hands, as she moved to the assistance of her daughter.

"George Holbrook is a devil! You need not explain, Allecha—you are not equal to the task. Open that door, and let the fresh air of Heaven blow in upon us. Holbrook killed his wife—I know it—if not outright, at least by slow torture. He and that vile adventuress whom he brought into his family have caused the deaths of all. My God! I can hardly believe it. And yet I knew that some dread calamity hung over aunt Katharine and the children from the moment that Lucile Luzerne crossed their threshold. But I'll avenge her, I swear it! Vengeance I'll have, though I should have to search the world for the guilty pair."

Thus spoke George McClellan, with clinched fists and flashing eyes, and features convulsed with fury and anguish. Then, turning to where the aged woman bent over his mother, he took the latter in his strong arms, and carried her into an adjoining chamber, where he laid her gently upon a couch.

A moment after, Mrs. McClellan opened her eyes and gazed up into those of her son, a heavy moan breaking from her lips.

"Mother, where is that scoundrel Holbrook? Do you not believe that he and that Luzerne woman, of whom I was from the first so suspicious, have dealt foully with aunt Katharine and the children?"

"Yes; we think they did. But we have no proof of it. Your brothers Charley and Allie followed them as far as Chicago, but there lost all trace of them, and returned home."

"And my aunt, and her little ones are all dead?"

His voice was cold, steely, unnatural, and murderously merciless.

"They all died within three weeks time."

"And you failed to write me the facts of the case—you only mentioned that my aunt was ill. Why was that?"

"That was when the babe was born. We did not know your address later, and so were unable to let you know what followed."

"You are right, mother. What was I thinking about? Did Lucile Luzerne nurse my aunt?"

"Yes, George."

"Holbrook, I suppose, insisted that she should remain to the last?"

"He did."

"Merciful Heaven! And the children—did they seem to waste gradually away?"

"They grew pale and thin, and Katharine noticed it; but she was too weak and helpless herself to understand or be suspicious, or if otherwise, she was afraid to send for your grandmother, or myself. She said something of the kind before she became insane with grief at the death of her little ones, and the desertion of her husband."

"Which died first, mother?"

"Georgie, then Frankie, and then the babe followed. Katharine passed away only a week later."

"Great God! Mother, I tell you I am convinced that my aunt was tortured to death! Yes, tortured a thousand times worse than if she had been burnt at the stake by a slow fire. I believe, too, that the children were poisoned."

As George McClellan said this, he grasped a hand of his mother and of his grandmother, while his sister clung to him, weeping.

"Listen!" he said, "and don't attempt to detain me. I'm off to the West. Tell my father and the boys. I cannot wait to see them; but if they ever see me alive they will know that aunt Katharine and her babes are avenged. You will all know that George Holbrook has gone to his account if you ever clasp my hands again."

Kissing each in turn, while they strove to hold him back, he clutched his hat and, regardless of their cries and remonstrances, rushed like a madman out from his childhood's home, and down the street to the depot, just in time to re-check his baggage and board the train for Suspension Bridge, as James McClellan bounded hatless into the depot, too late to see his son and prevail upon him to return, and leave vengeance to a Higher Power.

Months passed, when, after having traveled thousands of miles back and forth, George McClellan registered at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, Denver, Colorado; and here the espionage of a certain man deepened his suspicions, and the letters written by this spy opened out the trail toward the haunts of George Holbrook.

One week after examining these letters in Denver, our young friend entered Placer Palace, Big Medicine City, New Mexico, where we have seen him christened by Jim Jams,

DIAMOND DICK.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUELLO.

No sooner had Pueblo Pete struck the floor than, quick as a flash of lightning, Diamond Dick drew a revolver in each hand, while his voice rung clear as a bell:

"If any man, or men, in this assembly thinks enough of the coward at my feet to take this thing up, let him or them step forward now, or else forever hold peace. I'm a stranger in your town, and a tender-foot perhaps, but I think I can hold my own now."

"Reckon Pete don't think yer huff's very tender," said Bowlder Bill; which remark brought down the house, as the speaker drew "six" and bowie, and placed himself by the side of Diamond Dick.

Jim Jams jerked the pistol from the belt of the senseless man, and with the weapon presented, and its muzzle describing scalloped circles in the air in his shaky grasp, put on a desperate look, that was extremely comical, as he, too, ranged himself by the side of the daring dandy from Denver.

The crowd, however, stood dumfounded, and the Indian—the innocent cause of the strife—looked admiringly upon the youth who had risked his life in his behalf. In another moment he had thrown his blanket to the floor, and with his black snake-like eyes blazing, stood, scalping-knife in hand, by the side of his champion.

"Put up your weapons, Dick," advised Taos Tim; "that man hasn't a friend in this burg. He came into the town flat broke, and pretended to have lost his pile since he arrived, that he might get his whisky free. If any one here wants anything, he can get it. I'm your friend from the word 'go'; but, generally speaking, this is a square crowd."

"All right, sir," said Dick; "I'll take your word for it. I'm not afraid of a brave man, but I keep my best eye on a coward. I ordered drinks just now, I believe. Gentlemen," touching his hat, "this is a free bar for the next half-hour."

A deafening cheer at this rung through Placer Palace, and all hands soon ranged themselves at the counter for refreshments.

The Indian returned his scalping-knife to its place, and grasping the hand of the dandy from Denver, pressed it against his breast.

"Big Medicine is the friend of Diamond Dick. His lodge is open, and his heart will be glad when his white brother sits by his camp-fire."

"Good, my red friend! I'll come and see you, bet your life," was the hearty response.

"It is enough. Big Medicine's lodge is on the mountains, toward the north. He can shoot an arrow from his skin-house into the street of the white man."

"Dick," spoke up Jim Jams, familiarly; "that's ther chief what this hyer burg's named arter. He's a med'cin' man o' ther Kioways. He war fust off a chief, but he picked up too much from ther whites ter suit ther tribe, an' they bounced him. He knows more'n a dozen reds put together. Yer played a fust-class trump card when yer pertected him, fer he hain't got an enemy in ther burg."

"Dick," said Bowlder Bill, "I want yer ter count me as a true pard. Yer're fresh on this frontier, but I reckon yer kin salt a man 'bout es lively es ther best on us. Yer hes too much good natur' an' wealth ter be safe hyer-a-ways. Reckon yer hain't bin in New Mex' many moons, hes yer?"

Wild yells for Diamond Dick prevented the latter from replying to Bowlder Bill, except by a grasp of the hand, and our hero stepped briskly to the bar, where Taos Tim passed him a bottle of champagne, the wires only having been cut. An idea seemed suddenly to occur to him as he took it up.

He saw that he had created a good impression, notwithstanding his dandyish appearance, which he knew was an object of contempt among the borderers. He was in frontier rig, but he knew that he was too "fresh" and showy, and that he needed to roll across the street a few times, or tumble down a canyon or two, before he could expect to appear exactly square to the citizens.

As he objected to such a programme, he resolved to make himself "pure pewter" with the denizens of Big Medicine City, through the accomplishments and skill that were most valued and respected among them, and which he had practiced somewhat before his foot had pressed prairie sod or the rocky trails of the mountains.

With this end in view, Diamond Dick grasped the bottle of champagne, and stepped away from the bar.

Pueblo Pete still lay senseless on his back, his brutal face upturned, and our hero deliberately stood the bottle on the forehead of the prostrate man, drew some fifteen paces away; backing, as he did so, into the gambling portion of the establishment.

By this time the attention of the crowd was fixed upon the bottle, and Dick drew his revolver and fired, seemingly without taking aim.

The top of the cork flew through the air in a number of pieces; the strings were shot away, and the remainder of the cork left the neck of the bottle, striking the ceiling, while the seething wine shot upward in thin spray, and the sparkling juice of the grapes of sunny France ran down the sides of the bottle upon the face and head of Pueblo Pete.

"Pards, my bullet drew the cork, so don't let

the champagne waste," said Diamond Dick, placidly.

The gigantic borderer, a moment after, gave a grunt, and with a spasmodic quiver opened his eyes. He then sprung to his feet with a yell of pain and fury, as Placer Palace once again rung with cheers for Diamond Dick.

Drawing both sleeves across his smarting optics, and rubbing them vigorously, the desperado gazed around upon the crowd with a look of stupid rage; but as Dick happened to be standing in his rear, he did not observe him.

"Feller pilgrims," spoke up Pete, in a hoarse voice, "have thar bin a thunder-storm, a double-barreled cyclone, er hes ther dinnermite in Grasshopper Shaft 'sploded?"

A roar of laughter greeted the question.

"The comet slings a loose tail to-night, and it must have struck you," said Taos Tim, as he polished a decanter. "You haven't got the heart disease, or congestion of the brain running in your family, have you?"

"Pears to me thar's somethin' wrong with my thinkin' machinery," replied Pete, rubbing his head. "I've got bugs in my ears, or else my brains hes run out an' a swarm o' bees hes located in my skull. Reckon I needs some med'cin'."

"Take another pull at Big Medicine, and see if you can't make a better thing of it," advised the bar-keeper, with a laugh.

At these words Pueblo Pete sprung into the air with a whoop, and whirled about, his blood-shot eyes glaring with the most intense rage. Everything was now brought back to his muddled mind by this last remark of Taos Tim.

As Pete turned around Diamond Dick stood with his arms folded, and a boyish smile upon his face.

"By ther big terrantaler o' Taos! By ther skippin' scorpion o' Susquehanner!" Pete cried out. "Ef I members kerrect, my young squirt from Civilize, ye're ther tender-huff what clubbed me side o' my kerbase fer layin' my paw on the greasy red. Now, jist watch me, an' I'll scalp the scarefyin' heathen right plum afore yer peepers; an' ef yer lays a finger on my nattermy, I'll cut yer inter saddle-strings, so help me, Jumpin' Jericho!"

Drawing his bowie as he spoke, Pete sprung madly toward Big Medicine; but before he reached the Kioway, Diamond Dick stepped in front of him, which caused the latter to stop and make a lunge at his late adversary.

The instant that the huge borderer made a step backward, the leg of our hero flew forward and his foot clasped around the heel of Pete, causing the latter once more to lose his balance and fall backward heavily upon the floor, the point of his bowie being buried in the plank.

Again Placer Palace rung with wild shouts and cheers, and Pueblo Pete ground his teeth in a desperate frenzy of fury.

With a look of unconcern Dick walked back and forth, tapping his boot-leg with his whip as he did so.

In spite of this, however, his manner and expression would have led one to believe that he had some important object in view, and was evolving plans in his mind to favor or forward its accomplishment. The peculiar and scientific manner in which Dick had "laid out" the big borderer, joined to his extreme liberality and gentlemanly bearing, had won the favor of the majority of the motley crowd; but when they witnessed such forbearance the second time, their minds were filled with wonder and admiration.

Such usage as Pete had received was humiliating in the extreme, especially as he had been worsted by a youth yet in his teens, and a tender-foot at that. He felt it the more, because, in the early part of the evening he had been swaggering around the gaming tables in a most insulting manner, and boasting that he was the best man in Big Medicine City.

However, most of the frequenters of Placer Palace had set Pete down for what he was worth previous to the advent of Diamond Dick, but it afforded them great gratification to see him shown up. The dashing dandy from Denver had evidently made a clean jump into popularity.

"He's a high-falutin' sort of a cuss, dang'd ef he ain't!" said one.

"No tin-foil 'bout thet rooster. He's solid silver clean through."

"He does pan out heavy."

"He's peart es a panther-cat, limber es an eel, an' quick on ther shoot es an alligator gar."

"He's got es much snap in him es a new bear-trap, dog-goned ef he hain't, and don't you disremember hit."

"Reckon he's Barnum's Ingry-rubber man on a champagne stampede."

Such remarks passed here and there among the crowd, and if Pueblo Pete had any sympathizers, they prudently kept their opinions to themselves.

Taos Tim, who was, from business necessity, well schooled in reading the character and intentions of men by their manner and expression of features, knew that Pete was bent on deadly revenge, and was watching every movement of Dick, in order to get the drop on him.

Had the self-styled desperado been more calm and had less whisky on board, he would have realized how foolish and dangerous it would be for him to take any advantage of a man who had, in a short space of time, won the goodwill of the citizens of Big Medicine City; but he thought only of revenge. His revolver had been returned to his belt by Jams, previous to his recovery, and while seated on the floor, jarred to the very marrow by his unexpected fall, he determined to put a ball through the Denver dandy, before the latter could draw a weapon. With this resolve, Pueblo Pete, with a heavy groan, turned over on hands and knees, and in a stiff, slow way, exerted himself to regain his feet, his right side being next to, and in the shadow of the counter, where no eye could detect his right-hand movement.

With a sudden motion, the desperado pulled his revolver from the scabbard, and regained his position at a bound, at the same time cocking and presenting his pistol toward Diamond Dick; but before this movement was executed, it was detected by the latter, who, leaping forward, kicked the pistol from the hand of Pete, sending it flying behind the bar, and then pressed the cold muzzle of his own to the villain's forehead.

Loud shouts of "Shoot him!" "Kill him!" "Plug ther ornary cuss!" ran through the room.

"See here, sir," said Diamond Dick, in a cold, steel-like voice; "I have fooled with you long enough. I have proved you to be a second class coward. Landlord, return the scoundrel his pistol. He shall fight me now, and I'll give him a fair show for satisfaction, though he does not deserve it."

Taos Tim passed the revolver to its owner, as requested; first, however, letting down the hammer.

"Watch him close, Dick," warned the bar-keeper. "He's as treacherous as an Apache."

"I'll give him a chance at me again," was the reply. "Right about, face! March! We'll take the street on this deal!" And Pete found himself forced out of the door, and into the moonlight, followed by a yelling mob, and with Diamond Dick's revolver pressed against the back of his head.

"Measure off ten paces, gentlemen," shouted the dandy from Denver, as he stationed Pueblo Pete in the street, and then stepped briskly to the spot indicated by Bowlder Bill, who said in a determined voice:

"Pard, ef he bores yer, I'll make cold meat of him, sure's ye're a sinner!"

"No," was Dick's reply; "Don't harm the fellow. If he makes the best shot, he's the best man. Walk out there, Bill, and count. You, Pueblo Pete, at the word 'three,' shoot! I shall not kill you, for you're too mean to die at present, and I'll give you time to reform. However, I mark you for life, in order that you may not forget me. All ready for business?"

A surging line of excited men extended along the street, beyond danger from the bullets of the duelists, and along the line ran murmurs of dissatisfaction as Dick had spoken.

"Wipe him out, Dick!" "Lay ther big cuss out cold!" "Make a stiff outen him!" rung on all sides.

Bowlder Bill took his position as master of ceremonies:

"One—two—three!"

The reports of both revolvers blended in one, as Diamond Dick suddenly allowed his feet to slide apart; and, as though his legs were hung on hinges, sunk to the earth, the bullet of his adversary tearing through the crown of his sombrero at a point where his heart would have been had he remained erect.

Pueblo Pete uttered a hoarse howl of pain, and clapped his hand to the side of his head; for the ball from Dick's pistol had carried away the lobe of his ear.

Diamond Dick sprung upward like a jumping-jack, and stood as straight as a sheltered pine; but as he stood thus, with an amused smile on his youthful face, the report of a rifle sounded from a clump of cedars which grew between Placer Palace and the next shanty, and the tall, gayly-attired form of the dashing dandy from Denver fell backward into the dust of the street, his handsome, untanned face upturned to the moonlight, ghastly as death; his eyes sightless and glassy fixed upon the Queen of Night, whose bright rays played upon his gold-ornamented arms and the flashing gem at his throat, that had suggested his frontier cognomen to Jim Jams.

CHAPTER VI.

COMING HOME TO ROOST.

To describe truthfully the scene which followed the fall to earth of Diamond Dick would be impossible. We will, however, attempt it.

The unaccountable forbearance of the young stranger, as shown toward his adversary from first to last, had impressed the crowd greatly in his favor; and the fact that he would have been killed had he not saved himself by a movement which no other man in the burg could have performed, infuriated many against the desperado. Some rushed at once toward Pueblo Pete with yells of rage; others bounded toward

the clump of cedars to capture the assassin who had shot their hero.

Big Medicine and Jim Jams ran to the side of Diamond Dick, while Bowlder Bill sprung with cocked revolver directly toward the cedars, for he had located the position of the assassin from having seen the flash of his rifle. Before he reached it, there came a second report, followed by a yell of agony, from but a short distance beyond it.

Springing through the thicket, Bill came upon the body of a man, with rifle lying by his side; while coolly loading her own weapon stood one whom all knew, for immediately wild cheers were given for Dashing Dolores.

Kneeling for an instant by the corpse, Bill said:

"Yer made a center shot, Dolores, ef that's yer handle. Plug'd him in ther brain-box. Who are he?"

"Cache Charley," was the laconic reply; and the young female darted through the cedars toward the street.

"She's a cool piece, thet Dolores," said Bowlder Bill, "an' I wouldn't keer ter git on ther off side o' her. Jist 'zamine that rifle, will yer, 'an find out ef he shoved in a cartridge since he shot Dick?"

"Ya-as, Bill," said one of the miners; "hit's loaded up, an' I'll bet a doubloon he war a-drawin' on Dolores when she plugged him."

"Jist so. But who ther dickens air Cache Charley. Has any o' yer see'd ther pilgrim afore? I sw'ar I hain't."

"He war 'lowed two hours ter git up an' git outen this berg 'bout three weeks ago fer threatenin' ter shoot ther sheriff over ther range," said another.

Bowlder Bill thrust his hand in the pocket of the corpse, and took out a letter and a black mask.

"Bucks an' buzzards! Boys, what d'ye think o' thet?"

Thus spoke Bill, holding up the articles mentioned.

"He war a road-agent, er I'm ther boss liar o' New Mex! Whar's yer sheriff? Hit's plain this hyar Cache Charley wouldn't 'a' shot Dick, ef he wa'n't a pard o' Pueblo Pete's. Bet yer life, thet's what Pete air, an' I begins ter smell a lynch picnic. Fetch ther stiff along ter ther street, boys. Don't git riley ef yer think I'm a leetle too brash round yer burg. I think a heap o' thet Dick, tho' I never see'd him 'fore ter-night. Don't spit out a word 'bout ther mask an' letter. Let's see ef we kin pump Pete."

Bowlder Bill was immediately obeyed. The corpse of the so-called Cache Charley was carried out, and laid in front of Pueblo Pete; the latter having been secured to a tree, in a standing position, his life having been spared for the time being by the urgent pleadings of a few more cool than the rest.

Square Sim, the sheriff, who had been aroused from slumber by the din, held the citizens in check, pending the arrival of those who had gone in search of the man who had shot Diamond Dick. This excellent official had won his sobriquet from his reputation as a straightforward man, and was possessed of a fair education compared with the others who had chosen Big Medicine City for a "locate."

When the body of Cache Charley was laid in front of Pueblo Pete, the latter turned pale; a fact which was noticed by those who were eager to obtain evidence that would justify a "lynch picnic."

Bowlder Bill, for one, was convinced that the two men had been pards in the near past; and if this were so, he had proof sufficient in his pouch to hang him. Just then, however, he thought of Dashing Dolores, who might give some information in regard to the man who had been shot.

At this time, Big Medicine, assisted by one of the miners, was bearing the body of Diamond Dick toward the cabin at the base of the mountain, which nearly all knew to be the one occupied by Dolores. The latter was leading the way, and this led to the conclusion that she was going to have the sport from Denver taken proper care of.

Following the little party was Jim Jams, leading a magnificent horse, black as midnight, which Bill judged from its highly ornamented saddle and bridle to belong to Dick.

Up to this time, no man had ever been known to enter the little dwelling of Dolores, since she had erected the same with her own hands, declining any assistance from the citizens. Clearly the mysterious maiden must have taken a fancy to the dandy from Denver.

Only for a moment did Bill stand gazing after the party who bore Dick away. He at once turned his attention to Pueblo Pete, whose gaze was now bent and frozen upon the corpse of Cache Charley. The one quick glance which he gave around him at the motley crowd, with their determined faces, showed plainly that they would be beyond the control of Square Sim should any thing occur to prove the previous bad character of their captive.

Bowlder Bill was puzzled in regard to the removal of Diamond Dick.

"Did yer see Dolores, es yer calls her, when she struck ther street, Mr. Sheriff?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply; "I came just in time to see her with that young sport's head in her lap, and crying, as she always does when she is excited."

"Does yer think she ever friz her peepers on him afore?"

"How could she? He has just come into the burg, and she has been up and down the range for two years. She might have known him in the States, but that's hardly reasonable, for at his age he must have changed greatly since Dolores struck New Mexico, and she would not have recognized him. No, she's always on the lookout for something, and I reckon she was around just in time to see the assassin shoot Dick, and then she put a ball through the coward before he could reload and draw a bead on her, which he would have been forced to do, as she stood in his way of escape."

"Thet's 'bout ther way I hes put ther hull thing up myself; but I doesn't understand how yer comes ter be so well posted on ther 'lay-out'."

"I have been told all about the particulars," said the sheriff, "and I am not slow in forming opinions, which, by the way, are generally correct, as the boys here will inform you. You are Bowlder Bill, I believe, the unlucky prospector from down the range?"

"Bugs an' bufflers! Whar did yer git yer infermashe 'bout me?" Bill's face and voice both expressed his surprise, as he put this question.

"Never mind how I got it. I know you are 'white,' and that's enough. Have you any testimony to offer in regard to this Pueblo Pete?"

"Ya-as. Reckon yer'd better round up 'bout a dozen good squar' humans, sot yerself es a judge, an' call me es a fust-class 'telligent witness."

"All right, Bill; I'll do so at once."

The jury was quickly summoned, and, as Pueblo Pete witnessed the proceedings, his burly frame began to shake as if with an ague-fit.

Bidding the jury seat themselves in a half-circle, Square Sim, the sheriff and acting judge, called out:

"Order!"

All became silent, painfully so. It was a most impressive scene. The bright moon shone down upon the white face and glassy eyes of the dead man, and upon the horror-stricken face of the prisoner. Two score of rough and variously-appareled men, with stern features and folded arms, stood about the tree to which Pete was bound in perfect stillness.

"Proceed, Bill," said the judge; "we haven't got any Bible, but I reckon you will give the facts, as far as you know the same, as if under oath."

"Thanky, Sim. Reckon ye've got me down 'bout whar I belongs. Fust off, I'd like ter ax yer, Pueblo Pete, does yer know ther pilgrim what hes passed in his chips, quit ther game, an' levanted at stompede speed over ther range?"

Pete gazed searchingly toward his questioner for a moment, and then replied:

"I hes see'd him at Taos onc't er twicet."

"Then he ain't a pard o' yourn?"

"Nary pard! Never mixed with him 'tall."

"Then how does yer 'count fer his riskin' his chances fer bein' flopped over, er strung up a limb fer yer?"

"Hit 'pears ter me thet he must 'a' know'd ther Denver sport afore, an' wer' dead ag'in him fer somethin'. I don't reckon he'd risk his life fer me. Reckon he war off his kerbase ter some extent, er he'd 'a' know'd he'd be snatched bald-headed. Thet's ther way I'm calkerlatin' hit."

By this time Pete had begun to brace up, and had a bolder and more unconcerned air. It was evident that his explanations were reasonable, and that his words and manner had begun to impress the citizens somewhat favorably toward him.

"Now, pards," cried out Bowlder Bill very indignantly; "I calls Pueblo Pete thar, the dang'dest, bald-headed, bar'faced liar this er v'other side ther Rio Grande. I hes found a black mask an' a letter in the bullet-pouch o' Cache Charley, which proves he war a road-agent. Yer knows thet he war driv outen this burg fer threatenin' ter bore a hole through Squar' Sim, 'cos ther sheriff 'rested him fer cornfiscatin' a mule 'longin' ter a Taos man. Now will some on yer 'zamine Pueblo Pete's pouch an' pockets, ter see 'bout how he pans out?"

Square Sim now approached the prisoner whose face again assumed a ghastly hue, and soon produced from his pouch a letter.

"Come this-a-ways, Sim," said Bill, "an' 'low me ter 'zamine thet privately."

As the witness spoke, the sheriff joined him, and Bill said in a low voice, as he gazed at the letter:

"Dang my skin! Both on 'em seems ter be totin' Uncle Sam's mail. Let's compar' these billy-does. Wa-al, I'm dashed ef they ain't both fer the same human!"

"You are right, Bill. But one is from Denver, and the other from Ogdensburg, New York. They are for George Holbrook, Taos, New Mexico. We'll open the one from Denver." And suiting the action to the word, the sheriff

tore open the envelope, and in a low voice read as follows to Bowlder Bill:

"DENVER, Colorado.

"PARD GEORGE:—

"The information you received from that friend of yours in Ogdensburg was correct. The party has no doubt been on many false trails, but is now on a warm scent. George McClellan is about eighteen years of age, but above the average hight and strong in proportion. He is well fixed financially, and is the most fancifully attired and armed dandy sport that ever struck this section. You may depend if he gets a fair show he'll blow you out of your boots. He is reckless and daring to a fault, and dangerous in the extreme to you and to our band. I have written to Cache Charley and Pueblo Pete to lay for him, and send him, "over the range" if they get a fair show.

"Cap. Halfhand will be more appropriately named "Cap. Half-head," should McClellan get the drop on you. There will soon be paying work for the Wild Cats, as a heap of dust will be run through from the lower country within a month. I have been laying for information in regard to Wells, Fargo & Co.'s expected shipment. Jesse James has made a big haul in Missouri, and Claude Duval struck it rich in Utah. Look out for the Denver dandy, who knocks everybody blind by his heavy style.

"Yours, this side, or 'over the range,'

"DEAD SHOT.

"P. S. I have written Pete and Charley to wipe out McClellan if it can be done safely. Tell Pete to get the mail at Taos before he spreads himself towards Denver. I may strike a down trail any day. Have the Wild Cats keep their claws sharp."

"D. S."

"Cat-fish an' corn-shucks!" exclaimed Bill, as Sim finished the postscript. "That settles hit! Don't t'ar t'other letter open. We-'uns may hev a show ter find out this cuss George Holbrook by hit."

"You're right, Bill; you have more solid sense than I gave you credit for. Come, I'll read this to the jury. Pueblo Pete's fate is sealed."

"Will yer 'low me ter shove in my tongue ag'in?"

"Certainly. Go ahead."

"Wa-al, hit 'pears ter me we'd better call ther jury inter Placer Palace. Hit'll be a tough job ter read thet billy-doo by moonlight; 'sides, Pete'll know soon's yer commence thet he air a choked-off pilgrim. No need o' punishin' a human like ther 'Paches."

"All right," agreed Square Sim; and he called to the jury to follow him, as well as all all others who chose to join the procession.

It is needless to say that, as soon as the letter had been read to them, a mob of maddened men rushed out of doors, and to the tree, cutting the desperado loose and dragging him under a limb, over which a lasso had been thrown.

The next moment Pueblo Pete was swinging between heaven and earth, the raw-hide rope choking out his life.

At this instant, down the street galloped on his superb black steed, Diamond Dick.

He was hatless, and his long fair hair was flying in the wind.

Up to the crowd he rode, his eyes flashing with excitement, and the blood running down his face.

Jerking his horse to a sudden halt, its hams almost touching the ground, he drew and leveled one of his revolvers; then fired three shots in quick succession, cutting the lasso in twain, and the half-dead body of Pueblo Pete fell in a heap on the sward with a sickening thud.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANDIT SPY.

THE sudden advent upon the scene of the man whom every one had supposed to be either dead or mortally wounded, had been a most puzzling surprise; but this was nothing compared with the indignation that took possession of the citizens of Big Medicine City, when he braved and insulted them by interfering with their prompt and decisive mode of "civilizing" Pueblo Pete.

The fact that the "lynch picnic" had been brought about chiefly through their desire to avenge the cowardly assault upon himself made matters still worse.

However, no sooner had Pete's swaying body struck the ground, than our hero returned his weapon to his belt and sat on his horse with his eyes fixed upon the apparently dead body of his recent antagonist; but when he saw the deadly tubes that were now aimed at his own breast, he began to realize his situation, although not the slightest shadow of fear crossed his face.

Raising his right hand, he made a gesture to ask their attention, which was needless, for every eye was fixed upon him, and he began in a clear voice:

"Gentlemen, lower your weapons! I am not going to run away, and I do not fear to face you. When I have explained my actions and motives, you can do with me as you wish. Do you think I came to this far-away land for gold or silver? If so, you are greatly mistaken. I came for something that is dearer to me than either—*revenge*. You thought it strange, no doubt, that I did not kill Pueblo in the bar of Placer Palace, and stranger still that I did not put a bullet through his heart or bra'n when in the duel. Now you are angry—and I admit with good reason—that I should interfere with

justice and attempt to save his coward life. But, let me explain. I came here to hunt a man who has fearfully wronged me and mine—the murderer of his own innocent wife and children. All this is, of course, personal; but, when I tell you that this same man is the scourge of New Mexico, you will all be interested, as well as myself, in hunting him to the death.

"When I started from my home in the States, I was on a wild-goose chase, without any clue to guide me. I have been in Denver for some time, and while there I picked up a few points which gave me grounds to think that I had struck the right trail.

"What first attracted my attention was the fact that I was followed; I had a spy on my track, and knowing that no man had any occasion to pry into my affairs, except the dastard for whom I was in search, I began in turn to watch the spy. Noticing, from my room in the hotel, that he passed some letters into the post-office, I bribed the clerk to allow me to see the superscription, and copy it."

Turning to Bowlder Bill, Dick said:

"Bill, will you and Jim Jams favor me by ascertaining if Pueblo Pete has returned to consciousness? I do not wish him to hear what I have to say. My reasons for this will be obvious to you all before I am through with my explanation."

"He hain't got no more sense than a b'iled owl," was the report of Bowlder Bill, after examining the prostrate man.

"Well, gentlemen," continued Diamond Dick; "there were three letters mailed by the man who had been shadowing me. One was directed to 'George Holbrook, Taos, New Mexico; in care of Cache Charley.' The other two bore the address of Cache Charley and Pueblo Pete, respectively.

"No sooner had I seen these letters than I knew I had struck the right trail for my revenge. I waited some days, watching the spy, and even tried to pump him, but in this I did not succeed. I then lit out for Taos, striking your town last evening at a late hour. Good luck followed me, for I entered the bar of Placer Palace, and the first man I saw held a letter in his hand, the superscription of which caught my eye at once. It was 'George Holbrook, Taos, New Mexico; care Pueblo Pete.' This letter was post-marked, 'Ogdensburg, New York.'"

"An' thet letter war in Pete's pocket. Cache Charley hed ther one ther cuss writ in Denver," said Bowlder Bill.

"I am glad of that," said Dick; "but who has seen Cache Charley? Where is the man?"

"He is the man who shot you from the cedars," said Square Sim, pointing to the dead body.

"Shot me?"

"Yes," replied the sheriff, "and it was a mystery why he did it, until the letter we found on him explained it."

"Gentlemen," said our hero, "I was about to say that there was a mark upon the envelope which I saw. It was the half of a hand—a man's left hand—all the fingers being amputated below the knuckles. This was drawn in one corner with a lead pencil, evidently by Pete himself after he had taken it from the office. The man I am in search of, George Holbrook, is, I am positive, Captain Halfhand, the notorious outlaw, road-agent, and murderer, who is the chief of the Wild Cats, for he had his hand cut off in the same manner as the drawing on the envelope represents. I heard of the bandit at Denver, but little thought he was the same man for whom I hunted so long. The man who now lies there insensible—I hope he is not dead—has a letter which he will deliver at the risk of his life; and if he is watched and followed, we can ascertain where the Wild Cats hide themselves."

"Yer has got ther hull thing down squar' ter bottom bed-rock truth. Everything is es you say, pard Dick!"

Without noticing this remark of Bowlder Bill, he went on.

"Now you know why I did not kill Pete, and why I have interfered with your pic-nic. Bring that burly ruffian back to life. Make him believe we have mistaken him for some other man. Then leave him to me. Do this, and I swear to you that Captain Halfhand shall never again slash a mail-bag!"

The crowd calmed down almost instantly.

Bowlder Bill ran for some brandy, and poured the fiery liquor down the throat of Pueblo Pete; and the letter which had been taken from him was shoved back into the pouch of the senseless man by Square Sim.

Our hero still sat his horse, his pallid face appearing even more so from contrast with the little streams of blood that oozed from his wounded scalp; the bullet from Cache Charley's rifle having glanced along his skull.

While this was going on, Dashing Dolores, who, from a position near them, had heard every word that the sport from Denver had spoken, and knew all that had happened, suddenly appeared upon the scene. Gliding as gracefully as a gazelle to the side of the black horse, this beautiful waif of the wilderness grasped the hand of Dia-

mond Dick, and turned her dark, expressive eyes upward to his face.

The citizens looked significantly at each other in surprise, for Dolores had never been known to smile upon, or speak familiarly to any man since she first appeared in the range. It was well understood that the wrongs she had sustained, and to avenge which she waited, made her the vehement hater of the opposite sex.

We have said that Dolores was beautiful, and in saying so we have not stretched the truth in the least. She was a brunette, with wavy masses of soft, dark hair, ornamented in Mexican style. Her skirt was short, and made of fawn skin, as were her leggings, which she wore tucked into neatly fitting French boots. Both skirt and leggings were embroidered in bead-work, while a red silk sash about her waist supported a Spanish dagger and a Colt's navy revolver both heavily embossed with filagree work of silver. At times she carried a Sharp's carbine, and that she was a good shot, the bullet in the forehead of Cache Charley fully proved.

Little was known of the girl, except that she was the child of American and Mexican parentage. That she had been tolerably well educated was evident, if from nothing else, from her look and manner.

While Dolores stood thus, looking upward at Diamond Dick, the eyes of the latter were fixed in a strange manner upon the motions of Bowlder Bill, who was endeavoring to resuscitate Pueblo Pete, and he seemed oblivious of the presence of the lovely girl.

It was at this time that Big Medicine, the Indian ex-chief, stalked, with a look of deep concern from the undergrowth toward the mountains, and with long strides approached the spot where the young man, who had saved him from insult, and perhaps death, sat his horse as one in a trance.

The circle of citizens were all eagerly, and with deep interest, watching the movements of Bowlder Bill and Jim Jams, who were both bending over Pueblo Pete.

It was a strange, wild scene, with the towering Rocky Mountains as a high-rising background—a scene the counterpart of which has often been witnessed by the people of the plains and of the mountains, and one which would naturally tend to make the thoughts of the beholder of a grave and solemn kind; but Jim Jams, after witnessing the extravagant use of the brandy, Bowlder Bill having spilled some of the liquor, the aroma of which was very tempting, clutched the bottle, sprung to the trunk of the tree, and gluing his lips to its neck, drank with insane satisfaction. This caused a roar of laughter to run around the circle, and the sound seemed even to have been heard by the prostrate Pete, for he opened his eyes in a dazed manner. It was only for an instant, however, for he again sunk into a state of insensibility.

"Ef this hyer cuss didn't have a mighty close shave, I'm the boss prevaricator o' New Mex," said Bill. "I wouldn't bet high on his not glidin' over ther range es hit is."

"He wasn't jerked up very hard," said Square Sim. "He'll come round to business, never fear."

Big Medicine meanwhile approached the side of Dashing Dolores, and, glancing at her for a moment, took the hand of the young man in his.

"Diamond Dick heap sick. The lodge of Big Medicine is open. My white brother is welcome. The bark and leaves that the Great Spirit has made to grow on the mountains will make him strong and well. The heart of Big Medicine is filled with sorrow, for the bullet of the bad white man has caused my brother to be blind, and his ears deaf when those who love him speak."

Not a word fell from the lips of the sport from Denver in answer to this. Silent and motionless as a statue, he sat his horse, looking fixedly on the outstretched form of Pueblo Pete.

Just then the clatter of horses' hoofs sounded from the north, coming at lightning speed down the street, and Diamond Dick turned his head quickly, as if a strong magnetism had drawn his attention.

No sooner did our hero see the fast-galloping stranger who approached, than all his former fire, and vim, and energy seemed to return on the instant, and he gathered the reins in his left hand, whirled his horse about, and drawing one of his revolvers, yelled:

"Gentlemen, that is the spy of the Wild Cats! He is the man who wrote the letters at Denver!"

With these words Diamond Dick dashed toward the street, but ere he reached it his arms fell limp at his side, his frame swayed for a moment, and he fell backward from the saddle, as if stricken, to the sward.

The stranger, seeing the excited crowd at such a late hour, and the rope dangling from the tree, all so suggestive of a lynching party, began to think that his presence had been looked for, that the citizens of Big Medicine City knew his character and movements, and were only waiting for his arrival. Thus it is ever with the guilty.

This man who came at such speed down the street at midnight was young, good-looking

and well dressed in frontier rig far above the average in quality and ornamentation; but his face bore marks of dissipation, and his eyes wandered nervously, as if he apprehended danger at any time and from any point.

As Diamond Dick urged his horse from the vicinity of the Indian and Dolores, the latter watched him with intense anxiety, and when he fell to the earth, she gave a cry of anguish and rushed for the spot where he lay.

Suddenly she stopped, brought her rifle to her shoulder, then aimed and fired at the stranger horseman, who was now abreast of the point at which the citizens were assembled.

Realizing that her shot had not taken effect, she cried out, while her form trembled wildly: "Reckless Rube! My bullet flew wild this time, but I'll have your life before the moon wanes."

With a yell of derision, now that he saw he had a chance to escape, the night-rider urged his horse at headlong speed down the street toward the scattered thickets and foot-hills.

Dolores sprung upon the horse of Diamond Dick, whirled him about, and the black steed bounded like the wind in pursuit of Reckless Rube, while wild cheers for Dashing Dolores rung from the crowd.

Half-a-dozen of the citizens who had been deeply impressed by the words of our hero, and were anxious to capture the bandit spy, ran for their horses that were picketed in the rear of the shanties, and were soon in full chase, determined that if they could not overtake the outlaw, they would at least protect Dolores, for there was not a man in Medicine City who did not respect and hold in high esteem this lone maiden of the mountains, or who would not have shot to the death any one who dared insult the young, beautiful, and mysterious woman who had taken up her abode among the bowlders of the burg.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BETRAYED.

SQUARE SIM had not been mistaken in his opinion in regard to Dashing Dolores, in her conduct both before and after the shooting of Cache Charley.

We have heard the very laconic manner in which the girl answered the query of Bowlder Bill as to who the dead man was.

As she hurriedly left the clump of cedars, she came within view of Diamond Dick, who lay outstretched in the dust of the street, and apparently dead. Then it was that she uttered a stifled cry, and for an instant stood as if transformed into stone. Soon, however, she darted over the intervening space, threw down her rifle, and sunk on her knees to the earth.

Lifting the head of the young man in her lap, her frame meanwhile trembling with excitement, her tears fell upon the pale face of the gay youth hailing from Denver, who, though he had been but one short hour in the town, had gained the respect and admiration of all, notwithstanding his somewhat flashy "make-up."

But we will now glance back, and explain how Dolores came to cross the track of Cache Charley.

About the time that George McClellan was approaching Big Medicine City, and was within a mile of the town, Dashing Dolores was pacing impatiently back and forth over the rough floor of her little cabin, which was situated at the base of the rocky range, about two rifle-shots from the rear of Placer Palace, and to the north of the two rows of shanties called a city.

The dwelling was very small, and built of saplings, not any of them being more than four inches in diameter, but notched and placed in the same manner as the common log cabins of the border. The roof was formed of poles, to which were bound layers of long grass, one overlapping the other in such a way as to prevent the ingress of rain.

The inner sides and ends of the dwelling were covered with thick white cloth, such as is used for army tents, the same being stretched and tacked to the saplings, and giving the room the appearance of being plastered. In this single apartment there were a small bedstead, a table, chairs, book-case, stove and cooking utensils. Several pictures hung upon the walls, and well dressed skins of various animals and the plumage of rare birds, with peculiar and beautiful grasses and ferns, brightened and gave a tasteful air to the interior.

Vines and flowering creepers almost covered the cabin without, and several mountain pines which stood near it so concealed it from view that one might walk or ride within half a pistol-shot of the home of Dashing Dolores, and not once dream that there was the abode of any human being nearer than the little town below.

We have already had a description of the girl herself, and it has been stated that she had the black hair and eyes of her Mexican mother, and also that her complexion indicated that the blood of the Montezumas ran in her veins, mingled, however, as the light, creamy and rose tints of her skin proved, with that of the Anglo-Saxon.

But, if there were naught else to indicate that a Mexican woman gave her birth, her eyes would have betrayed that such was the case,

and especially at this time, as she paced up and down with impatient, nervous step, the floor of her little cabin home. A hatred intense flashed so fiercely from those dark orbs that an observer could not have refrained from a shudder, as the glances so murderous shot like lightning, showing that a pent-up volcano of rage was scathing her very brain.

That these same eyes could, under certain circumstances, dart looks of love from beneath their long lashes, and glance shyly, and with innocent trust and idolatrous affection into those that had the power to call forth such feelings, none who ever associated with women of her mixed blood could doubt.

Generally speaking, children of such parentage, especially girls, speak the language of the mother, and also adopt the religion, manners and customs of her people; but Dolores was an exception. She spoke English as fluently as she did Spanish, for the good reason that she had been educated in San Antonio, Texas, where American schools abound.

As the young woman paced over the floor, faster and faster, her furious passion seemed to increase with her movements, and she beat the air with her small, delicate hands, which were clinched tightly, her fingers cutting into her palms, while her pearly teeth were shut tightly together.

Back and forth, like a caged wild beast, she walked, and, at last, as if her brain would burst from the cranium if she did not give vent to her feelings in words, she cried out in a voice so agonizing, desperate and hopeless, that it would have melted a heart of stone.

"*Madre de Dios!* How I loved him; and yet he deceived me! He laughed in my face when my little baby boy was gasping out its feeble wail, calling for the angels to take its little soul back to the home whence it came. Yes! Laughed and sneered, and said I was no wife of his; that he had a wife in Galveston—a white wife, he said—when he led me to the altar. As if I was not as white and pure as an infant, when first his false tongue and deceitful smiles lured me from friends, and home, and happiness!

"Taunted me when my babe—his babe—was dying within his accursed grasp, and I was too weak to lisp a prayer for my darling, or to curse the dastard who had so basely deceived my innocent, trusting girlhood!

"But, Reuben Reynolds, or Reckless Rube, as you are now called, I shall yet exult over your misery, despair and death. I shall yet gaze into your coward eyes that ever avoided my glances and gloat over your downfall. My sworn revenge, as slowly the power of sight leaves you, and demons come with their somber wings that beat the air with sounds like the last gasps of strong men being tortured to death, to drag you down to the bottomless pit where your quaking soul will burn in the fire that is never quenched! For two years—two long and weary years—have I strove in vain to meet you face to face, and sheathe my knife in your craven heart. Miles by the thousand have I traversed, over prairie, desert, plain and woodland—over rocky range, through deep canyons and the wilds of Apache and Comanche lands—often within a few rifle-shots of my game, but never knowing it until the Evil One or your coward conscience had warned you onward. From mine to mine have I traced you, but never have I fastened my eyes upon your hated, accursed form. As much as I madly loved you once, a thousand times more do I detest and abhor you now! I shall never smile until I witness your death-agony; until the death-sweat stands in big drops upon your brow; until your horror-filled eyes turn glassy, and your teeth grind together with the harrowing pangs of the body, that shall be as nothing compared with the tortures of the soul to which you are doomed!

"On, on, like the Wandering Jew, have you been urged by the knowledge that I was on your track; but now you have left no trail, no sign nor trace. However, I bide my time. It will surely come. As the needle to the pole, so you will eventually be drawn to this obscure dwelling of mine, and to your death. Oh, little did my good mother think when she had me baptized *Dolores*, that it would prove a name befitting her child—that sorrow would be my lasting heritage!

"I wonder sometimes that I am not a maniac; but all that keeps my poor brain from an insane whirl is the memory of that dreadful night which calls for revenge—that night when, spurned and cursed by you, Rube Reynolds, you that I had worshiped as a god, I lay in despair and anguish, with my murdered baby in my arms. All that keeps me sane, or seemingly sane, is my oath of vengeance; and I must live until I hear those dying moans and gasps, which will be the sweetest music that ever greeted my ears!

"But I must go out into the night and breathe the fresh air of heaven, for my brain throbs with the agony brought on by these maddening thoughts."

Pressing her hands for a moment upon her brow, Dolores caught up her sombrero and rifle and rushed out from the cabin and down the decline toward Big Medicine City.

The poor, half-crazed girl soon reached the rear of Placer Palace, and passing around to the north side of the building, was brought to a sudden halt by the appearance of the dandy from Denver, who at this moment urged his horse past the front of the hotel, and secured him to a bush but a short distance from the spot where Dolores stood, she being screened from view by a dwarf pine.

With lips apart and eyes bent in surprise and admiration, forgetful of the hatred she professed to feel for every man, she stood chained to the spot; then, when the gayly attired youth entered the building, Dolores crept up, and stood, as she had often done before, where she could view the interior of the bar.

From her position she could look directly into the face of the stranger as he walked up by the side of Pueblo Pete and ordered the champagne. For the time being Dolores forgot her dream of vengeance, and did not even realize where she was, nor understand the new emotions which seemed to have taken possession of her mind and heart. Soon they resolved themselves into a feeling of deep concern and anxiety, as she saw that the handsome stranger was evidently in great peril. However, as she witnessed the peculiar but highly effective manner in which the young man, who had been by Jim Jams christened "Diamond Dick," prostrated the gigantic Pueblo Pete upon the floor, her fears for him vanished, and increased admiration, akin to new-born love, took their place.

The second time that Pete was stricken down Dolores was filled with exultant joy, and a proud and satisfied smile played upon her lips, for the first time, perhaps, in years. It was almost as if she had an interest and ownership in the dashing sport from Denver.

When Dick forced the redoubtable Pete into the street at the muzzle of his revolver, with the intention of fighting a duel with the desperado, Dolores did not catch the words nor understand the intentions of the parties, but thinking that the youthful stranger was coming after his horse, and might discover her, she stealthily made her way to the rear of the building, pausing only a moment to peep through a crack at the gaming tables.

To her surprise she saw that the crowd had all departed, and the hotel was deserted. She now began to understand why there had been such an unusual shuffling of feet and tramping upon the floor, and it flashed upon her that something unusual was transpiring upon the street.

The next instant Dolores heard the reports of the revolvers of the duelists, and she started to run around to the south side of Placer Palace just as the crack of a rifle rung sharp on the still night air, and a man broke from the dense thicket of cedars, shoving a cartridge into his weapon as he ran.

The man soon discovered, however, that he was observed; that a human form stood between the shanties in his path of escape, and he raised his rifle to his shoulder; but, ere he caught sights, a bullet tore through his brain, and he fell to the earth a corpse—shot dead by Dashing Dolores.

A moment more and Boulder Bill sprung upon the scene, at the head of nearly the entire posse of citizens.

Dolores had noticed that Bill had taken a fancy to the youth from Denver, and had seemed disposed to stand as his friend while in the bar-room, and she now saw that Bill was pale as death, and was also greatly excited.

At once the thought occurred to her, as she revealed the name of the man she had killed, that perhaps Diamond Dick had been shot. No sooner did this suspicion enter her mind, than she darted through the cedars to the street, uttering a cry like that of a wounded animal, and sunk to her knees in the dust, taking the head of the stranger youth upon her lap, while the tears from fountains which had long been dried up by her own anguish of soul, fell freely, relieving for the time her weary, overtaxed brain.

CHAPTER IX.

"A LODGE IN SOME VAST WILDERNESS."

"TAKE that stiff, boys, and plant it. I reckon we can carry out Diamond Dick's plan with a better prospect of success, if Pueblo Pete don't get a sight of his defunct pard, when he comes to his senses."

"That's a solid, black-flint, bed-rock reason, sheriff," said Boulder Bill. "Hyer, bud, let me h'ist yer up till yer kin cut ther lariat offen ther limb. Ther cuss better not see hit when he opens his peepers."

"Dashing Dolores has lost her wits again," asserted Square Sim. "She hain't had a spell for some time. Shouldn't wonder if that stranger was the man she's in hunt of."

"I'm a-bettin' she's found ther very cuss she's bin layin' for. That air, she got a squint at him. I wouldn't be in his boots fer a peck o' nuggets."

Thus spoke Boulder Bill, as he laid Pete back on the ground, apparently dead, and joined Square Sim and Big Medicine, who were examining Diamond Dick. A number of the citizens were at the same time carrying the corpse of

Cache Charley to the rear of the shanties for burial.

"Air ther lively, high-kickin' sport from Denver 'bout ter glide over ther range?" asked Bill.

"No," said the sheriff; "he's not of the kind that go off so easy. His brain has got a jar, though. How is he, chief?"

"Big Medicine take Diamond Dick to lodge," replied the Indian. "Make well before sun come."

"Wa'al," said Bill, "reckon yer kin take better keer o' him than any of us. He's a cool cuss, clean from Alfer ter Omeger, dang'd ef he ain't! He's chuck full o' chain-lightnin' when he's at hisself, but he ain't got no more vim now nor a slice o' hot bacon. Hit's a dang'd good thing he did wilt, I reckon, fer he'd 'a' broke his hoss's neck er his own, a-skootin' through ther gullies arter thet Reckless Rube, es Dolores calls him. Reckon ther cuss won't come a-root-in' round this burg ag'in."

"I hope the boys will catch him," said Sim; "only Pete must not see him if they do."

"Thet Dolores air a reg'lar panther-cat, an' ef she gits nigh enough ter thet Rube she'll drap him, er wing him. She's a plum center shooter when she ain't riled up."

"I hope the outlaw won't kill her," was Sim's reply.

"By ther t'arin' terrantaler o' Tacs, sheriff, ef ther ornary whelp kinks a ha'r o' her head I won't chaw bacon until I've bored a dozen side-shafts through his 'naterny."

"The whole burg would take the trail if it came to that," said the sheriff. "She's a lady, say what they will."

"She's a daisy!" exclaimed Boulder Bill. "She's ther neatest piece o' beaded buckskin I ever froze my peepers onter— Say, what ails you, Big Medicine? Can't yer tote Dick? Waal, I'll jine yer. Sheriff, you kinder run things hyer-a-ways till I shows up ag'in."

"All right, Bill. You assist the chief. I'll tend to Pete."

The two then lifted Diamond Dick and bore him beyond the line of shanties up to the base of the range, where, some fifty yards from the cabin of Dolores, they entered a narrow passage between two huge rocks, and soon emerged into a clear grassy space, on the far side of which stood a large buffalo-skin lodge, or wigwam, a cone-shaped, tent-like dwelling.

Laying Dick upon the sward, the Kioway sprung into his lodge, returning with a soft, dressed robe; this he spread on the grass, and Bill assisted him to lay the young man carefully upon it.

"Thar," said the borderer, with a sigh of relief, "Dick air hunky dory fer awhile; but I reckon he'll be b'ilin' over with be ole 'zasperate when he 'roves back ter reg'lar thinkin', and finds out he's slipped a deal in this lively little game. Yer reckon he'll be on ther whiz, Big Med? 'fore sun-up? Waal, I'll levant back an' sling soft-sawder an' cotton at Pueblo Pete. Ef we-uns git on ther trail o' ther Wild Cats, we'll make fur fly. Thar'll be a show fer yer ter sling in a few war-whoops, ef yer feels inclined thet-a-ways, 'sides t'arin' ha'r sum consid'able. Take keer o' Dick. So long!"

As Boulder Bill brought his remarks to a close he stooped, felt of Dick's pulse, tore off a huge quid from a plug of nigger-head, and strode away through the rocky passage on his return to the burg.

Big Medicine paid no attention whatever to the words of Boulder Bill, his solicitude in regard to his patient banishing his interest for the time being in aught else.

Procuring some ice cold water from a tiny streamlet that flowed down the mountain side at one corner of his rock-inclosed retreat, the Indian bathed the head of the youth and washed away the blood from his face and hair. He bounded up the side of the cliff and soon returned with a bunch of roots and green leaves, which he pounded until they were reduced to a pulp. This he pressed upon the wound, and secured in place by a band of soft buckskin.

The Kioway then placed in position a miniature lodge constructed from buffalo skins that had been scraped and bleached nearly as white as canvas.

It was about four feet in height, and without any opening at its top, as is usually the case.

There was a square entrance on one side of the little lodge, a piece of skin being sewed closely at the top, while strings were secured along the sides of this flap piece and close to the others that were attached to the main wigwam.

Big Medicine then built a huge fire near at hand, and then selected from a pile of stones near him, and which had evidently been brought from the bed of some stream, a dozen choice ones, which he placed around the edge of the burning mesquite—a wood that throws out a most intense heat. He then glanced at Dick, who was still in a comatose state, and then disappeared for a few moments, returning with an armful of herbs, which threw out a pungent perfume. These he threw down, and then spreading a robe inside the little lodge, he grasped Dick by the shoulders and dragged him inside the miniature *tepee*, placing him in a sitting posture against the center-pole, and binding

him to the same in such a way as to cause his knees to touch his chin.

This done, the Indian procured a thick piece of buffalo-skin, with which he grasped, one at a time, the now heated stones, placing them in a circle around his patient, and throwing the herbs upon them.

A thick, fragrant steam quickly arose, and with a grunt of satisfaction the Kioway let down the flap-piece over the entrance and secured it. He had, while in Placer Palace, intimated to Diamond Dick that "his lodge was open;" but it was now very certain that if the young man should recover in his present close quarters, and realize that he was in the home of his red friend, he would be forced to the conclusion that the assertion was a decided lie. There was little doubt that his reception was a decidedly warm one, but the lodge was emphatically closed.

When the Kioway had secured the stakes, he sprung into the big *tepee*, and was absent some ten minutes; but when he reappeared, no one would have recognized him as the same man who had but just now been so zealous and attentive in the care of Diamond Dick.

He now appeared as the Medicine Man of his tribe, attired in all the hideous trappings that belonged to his profession, and prepared to practice all the ceremonies that were customary previous to having any intercourse with the whites; for, in addition to their skill in the use of herbal remedies, these men are supposed by their people to possess the power of driving away the Bad Spirit, whom they believe to have entered the bodies of those who are ill.

Their powers, real or assumed, are beyond the comprehension of the simple savages, with whom any strange thing or piece of mechanism which they do not understand or any man who is gifted with powers or skill that are strange to them, is "Big Medicine."

The Colt's revolver, the locomotive, and anything else that was appalling to the Indians, were each in their turn thus classed and designated.

Nelson Lee, who was born and reared among the Catskill mountains, but who, when he had arrived at man's estate, went to Texas and became a noted scout and ranger, was captured by Comanches on the Rio Pecos, and owed his life to an old-fashioned alarm watch. While winding it up, he would feign to talk with the Great Spirit by word and gesture; and in this he was considered a big medicine man, and was the only one spared out of fourteen Texans who were captured at the same time.

He was once sold, with his watch, for six hundred horses, to a branch of the tribe under the noted chief, Rolling Thunder, who was killed by Lee, the latter stealing upon him as he lay outstretched, drinking at a spring, and braining him with a hatchet. Lee then mounted the chief's horse, and after wandering for two weeks in the mountains, found his way at length to Santa Fe. He was a Big Medicine indeed; and the Indians, when visited by friendly tribes, always exhibited him, and induced him to "make a talk with the Great Spirit," the warriors meanwhile standing around and listening with superstitious awe, as the old "turnip" whirled and whizzed out its peculiar alarm.

This digression is necessary to explain the real nature and office of these men in their tribes, because most people in civilization suppose an Indian Medicine man to be one who merely heals and cures with herbs and barks; when, in reality, their knowledge of the curative properties of such remedies have been learned from the missionaries who have penetrated these wilds from the North and from the City of Mexico. Since then, it is true that the red-men have discovered for themselves many remedies hitherto unknown to the whites.

As our friend Big Medicine bounded from his lodge into the moonlit space in front of it he resembled nothing in the heavens above or the earth beneath, his appearance being such as would drive all hope and life from any one in an ordinarily weak condition, if he did not succeed in expelling the Bad Spirit, as was his intention.

The entire head and neck of the Kioway was hidden by the huge head of a buffalo bull; the horns, flowing "mop" and neck-skin were complete, while a panther hide hung from his shoulder to his feet, and his waist and limbs were covered with the skins, rattles, and dried heads of snakes, centipedes, and tarantulas. Upon his leggings were daubed strange and hideous hieroglyphics, and beasts and reptiles in different colored pigments.

His broad breast was decorated in the same manner. In one hand he held a horn that was filled with the teeth torn from the jaws of slain foes of his tribe, and coiled about his arm was a writhing, hissing rattlesnake. A tum-tum, or Indian drum was secured to his belt, and a stick to beat the same was in his right hand.

Coming up to the little lodge, within which, amid the stifling steam, Dick was secured, Big Medicine gave a most unearthly howl, and then sprung here and there in a spasmodic trot and contorting his horribly appeared form into every conceivable shape; meanwhile shaking the horn of teeth in the air, while the snake

hissed and squirmed about his head, as the Kioway frantically beat the tum-tum.

Circling the lodge in this manner, he began a wierd, monotonous chant; and then, at times, yelled like a wolf, shrieked like a panther, ending with a howl and a fierce guttural chant that sounded perfectly appalling.

Big Medicine's lone fandango was, however, doomed to be brought to a sudden close; for, in the midst of it, there came the sound of the bursting of dry hides, and the little buffalo-skin wigwam arose in the air like a balloon, and Diamond Dick sat, bound to the lodge-pole, the moon shining down upon his face, which was stamped with bewilderment, not unmixed with rage.

Hurling, with one kick, the lodge from its pole, he started to his feet, just as Big Medicine in his hideous "make-up," sprung in one wild bound over it, and stood quivering and panting with exertion in front of his patient.

Not a word was spoken, until Diamond Dick, having gazed wildly around for a full minute, began to realize that he was still on Mother Earth, and that the horrible figure before him might be human, cried out:

"What kind of a circus and menagerie are you giving me here? Who, or what in the fiend's name are you? If that is the extent of your canvas, I can't travel with you, for I'm not in the side-show biz. What sort of a job have you put up on me? Cut these cords, I say, if there is any human about you, and let me out of this. I want to stretch myself, and breathe pure air again. Give me a drink of water, will you?"

With a cry of relief, Big Medicine sprung into his lodge, and the next moment appeared in his original character. Proud of his success, he said:

"Big Medicine say make Dick well before sun come. Dick well in one hour. Kioway tongue not forked."

"Well, I should say you must think that like cures like. If you haven't given me a Turkish bath, I'm a liar. I thought I must be in the infernal regions when I saw your devilish rig, especially after those fiendish yells of yours. Where am I, any way? I'm blest if I can locate myself."

"Big Medicine's lodge open, but his white brother too sick to come. Big Medicine bring him."

"Well, I should say your lodge was open now, but I'm the craziest man out of an asylum if it wasn't the tightest place I ever found myself in; and it took a vigorous kick to open shop."

"Come," said the Kioway, cutting the bonds and assisting Dick to rise; "come. Must run fast. Run with red friend, or take heap cold. Then get stiff. My white brother been much hot, much sweat. Take run, then lie in buffalo-skin one hour. War-path open. Bad white men thick in mountains. Find chief of Wild Cats."

After running his patient around the rock-enclosed opening for ten minutes, Big Medicine covered Dick with a robe and made him lie down in the big lodge, bidding him keep quiet for a time. Then the Kioway stole out and stalked rapidly down toward the "City."

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE BANDITS.

SEEING that Reckless Rube was unharmed by her bullet, Dashing Dolores galloped after him in hot chase, mounted, as we have seen, upon Diamond Dick's horse. That she had recognized the man, there could be no doubt, from the fury shown in her every word and expression.

None of the citizens knew anything of him or could say that they had seen him before. His face, as clearly shown in the moonlight, was that of a remarkably handsome man, with jet-black mustache and imperial and long curling hair of the same hue.

All were satisfied that Dolores had good and sufficient reasons for taking the man's life; and they felt very sure, besides, that he was an outlaw as well. In consequence of this, those who followed in pursuit of him had two objects in view—to protect Dolores and to capture the man whom she called Reckless Rube.

It was with extreme difficulty that the girl could keep within view of the man whom she seemed resolved, at all hazards, to overtake. However, she urged on her steed, until, at the point where she had last seen the outlaw, she discovered him far below, in the bottom of a canyon, down the steep side of which was a trail much used by the miners.

Notwithstanding the perilous nature of such a descent upon an "American" horse, Dolores did not hesitate, and the black steed, although not accustomed to such traveling, finally reached the bed of the canyon, when his rider struck him with her rifle, and galloped on in mad pursuit.

The noble animal, with far-reaching bounds, was just turning a bend in the canyon, and Dolores felt certain that in one moment more she would be within range of the man she was pursuing. Nor was she mistaken, for Rube Reynolds was thrashing his mustang furiously, not two hundred yards away when she caught sight

of him, as her horse sprung around the canyon curve.

Trembling in every limb, covered with foam, and with the blood dripping from his flanks, the outlaw's mustang staggered onward with a snort of pain and terror, his rider turning his head to gaze behind him, as if apprehensive that some dread danger was impending with which he was powerless to cope. Just ahead was another bend, and as Dolores perceived this she raised her rifle, and at the moment man and mustang were about to disappear, the canyon rung with a far-sounding report.

With a cry that was almost human, Reckless Rube's horse sprung into the air, and then fell dead; while his rider, with a yell of terror, fled up the canyon, well knowing that his pursuer could have shot him instead of the horse, had she so wished, and consequently she had in view a more torturing revenge.

In one mad bound the steed of Dolores now sprung over the dead mustang and darted around the bend. Glancing ahead, the girl caught a clear view beyond the curve, and brought her horse to a sudden halt, by a quick and firm jerk of the reins. It was not strange that she should do so, or that she should turn ghastly with sudden fright, for the scene within the canyon was such as would have appalled the stoutest heart, even had it pulsed in the breast of one well used to scenes of blood.

The canyon beyond the bend around which Reckless Rube had fled was quite wide and entirely free from rocks, level as a floor, and now brightly illumined by the moon.

But neither this, nor its natural surroundings, striking and picturesque though they were, drew the attention of Dolores; for her gaze was fastened upon a line of horsemen that stretched from side to side of the canyon, and barred her way, each wearing a black mask, from out the eye-holes of which shot glances that chilled the blood, and caused her for the moment to tremble in her saddle—more, however, from the totally unexpected sight than from hopeless fear.

Each of the score of masked night-riders held tight rein in his left hand, and cocked revolver in his right; and thus they stood on seeming defense, when Reckless Rube dashed through their line, too excited and shaken up to speak and explain the situation.

Only for a moment did Dolores sit silent upon her horse, for soon her ears caught the clattering sound of hoofs in the rear, coming down the canyon whence she had come.

Thoughts and plans darted through the girl's mind. She was daring and cunning, and she realized fully her desperate position; but this did not cause her the deep concern and anxiety that she felt as these sounds fell faintly on her ears.

She felt sure that some of the citizens of Big Medicine City had followed her, to protect her and induce her to return, and that she had led them to their death; for she was positive there were not men enough to cope with the band of desperate outlaws before her, who were, she knew beyond a doubt, the gang known as the "Wild Cats," commanded by the notorious Captain Halfband.

Filled with deep concern and bitter regret, Dolores formed a plan to save them, or at least to avert a too sudden and overwhelming surprise.

Whirling her horse to the right-about, and with a shrill, piercing scream, she fired her rifle, aiming between two of the bandits, and at the recumbent figure of Reckless Rube.

A cry of agony followed the shot, mingling with the clatter of hoofs, as the black steed bearing the brave girl flew like an arrow from the bow, and around the abrupt bend of the canyon, not ten feet from the position at which she had first halted when the Wild Cat band met her view.

That the outlaws had felt confident of her capture, and that this flank movement was totally unexpected, was perfectly plain. Her loud scream, which, with her appearance and "make-up," had proclaimed her sex, the report of her rifle, and the yell of Reckless Rube, who had joined them in so strange and unexpected a manner—all these—tended to confuse the bandits for the time.

The well-directed "snap" shot of Dolores had torn through the muscular portion of Rube's arm, near the shoulder, and caused the yell, followed by the cry:

"Catch her, pards; catch her! Capture or kill the she-devil, or she'll betray us to the 'cits' of Big Medicine City!"

Before these words were well clear of Rube's tongue, and as the tail of the black horse whisked around the curve of the canyon, a peculiar sound, like that made by a tom-cat, came from the right of the line; and, driving spurs into their horses, the bandits galloped in pursuit of the beautiful girl, who had, by her dash and quickly executed movements, outwitted them.

The canyon was narrow at some points, and wide at others; and this caused much disorder and confusion among the eager horde of outlaws, but six being able to ride abreast in some places.

The noble animal ridden by Dolores seemed to understand what was expected of him, and avoided all obstacles, though entirely unguided.

Slipping another cartridge into her rifle, our heroine turned in her saddle, and seeing a number of the bandits coming around the bend, she threw herself half around, took aim, and fired.

One yell of agony, and the leading outlaw threw up his arms and fell backward to the earth, forcing his comrades behind him to draw rein; but the next instant the rattling discharge of many revolvers awakened the echoes, and the leaden messengers of death cut the air, while the noble steed and his fair rider flew over the ground with greater speed.

Glancing ahead, Dolores now saw some half-a-dozen miners coming at a headlong gallop toward her, lashing and spurring their horses unmercifully to gain the point from which the sound of firing proceeded. On they came until within sound of her voice, when she cried out wildly:

"Back! Ride back! Whirl your horses and spur for your lives! A score of Wild Cats are behind!"

It needed not the sight of some of the masked riders to cause this order to be promptly obeyed. Turning about, they galloped on the back trail, the brave girl bringing up the rear at headlong speed.

Dashing Dolores had noticed that the Wild Cats were mounted upon animals superior in strength and speed to the ponies and half-breeds of the citizens; and not only this, but that they were fresh, the bandits having evidently but just started on a foray or raid. This knowledge forced upon her the painful fact that it would be impossible to reach the trail by which she and the miners had come into the canyon, before the outlaws would be upon them; but she suddenly recollected that there was a trail near at hand which led up the south side of the canyon to the plain above. Resolved that she would save her friends and foil her enemies, she cried out:

"Give the maskers a volley, pards! Then spur deep for the south trail. It is our only hope for life. If we gain the plain, we are safe!"

A well-directed volley from the rifles of the citizens followed, and then the cry from Dolores:

"Down, pards! Down, or you are all dead men!"

Every miner threw himself from his horse, just in time to escape a hail of lead that cut the air over their heads. Then came the order from Dolores:

"Mount and away for the south trail!"

Though this decision of the girl to take the south trail up the side of the canyon seemed at the first to the citizens to be a foolish one which would expose them to the fire of the bandits, a second thought caused them to decide that it was the only course for them to pursue. Whether or not, there was not a man among them who would not have gone unquestioningly wherever Dolores proposed.

Besides, when they recalled the lay of the land, they felt less concern and doubt as to the success of their attempt; for it was just possible that the outlaws might gallop past the south trail, and dash down the canyon without observing them.

On sped the black horse, the miners now falling into the rear singly, and turning around the bend close to the bank; the fair girl guiding her steed up the steep path, close followed by all.

Urging their animals forward the citizens gazed back when half-way up the winding trail, when thundering along the bed of the canyon dashed the masked riders, speeding past the trail, and unconscious that those whom they pursued were above their heads, straining every nerve to reach the plain and safety.

Not so heedless as his followers was the bandit chief, however; for, being in the rear, and his eyes wandering suspiciously in every direction, he caught sight of the moving forms on the canyon side.

With a yell, he brought his rifle to his shoulder and pulled trigger. The horse of the last miner in the line reared and fell backward with his rider, both rolling down the dizzy height, and striking the canyon-bed with a sound of crushing bones.

Dolores slid from her horse, a movement that was followed by the others, and at the same time they leveled their rifles over their saddles and fired down upon the horde of Wild Cats, who returned the compliment without, however, doing any harm. As the citizens again urged their animals forward, they had the satisfaction of seeing that two of the outlaws and three of their horses had fallen in the agonies of death.

The amazement and rage of the bandits knew no bounds, as they saw the party they had made sure of killing or capturing lead their horses from the trail to the level plain.

Suddenly Dolores recollected that Reckless Rube, to capture whom she had risked so much, must have been left behind in the canyon by the bandits; and she, unobserved, walked her horse into the scattering clumps of trees until

safe from discovery by her friends, and then sped once more on the path of vengeance, up the bank of the canyon to the west.

CHAPTER XI.

LEVANTED.

PUEBLO PETE, although to every appearance more dead than alive, was, at the time Big Medicine and Bowlder Bill bore Diamond Dick to the lodge of the Indian, fully cognizant of everything that was transpiring around him.

That he had been forced into a duel with Dick was clear, and also that the citizens had dragged him to execution; but whether having seen Cache Charley dead before him was a reality, or a vision of his disordered mind, he could not decide.

He believed, however, that Diamond Dick was either dead or dangerously wounded, for he felt confident that the shot which he had fired had done the business. His thoughts were still very much tangled and chasing one another, and from the revolving kaleidoscope he could make out very little with clearness; but as he saw Bill and the Indian carry away Dick's senseless body, he began to realize that there was still considerable danger for himself.

He had a faint recollection that a rope had been about his neck, and a soreness of the throat convinced him that such a thing had occurred. Why he had not been hanged or shot, and how he had escaped the vengeance of the miners, was a mystery.

As Square Sim and the remainder of the crowd left his vicinity and entered Placer Palace, Pete quickly thrust his hand in his bullet-pouch, and his fingers coming in contact with the letter, he thought at once of the necessity of its being delivered. Slipping his hand around his belt, he next found that his revolvers were gone, and this fact made him more anxious to "skip" the town, for the absence of his weapons appeared as though the citizens had suspected his true character.

As he arose to a sitting posture a heavy groan burst from his lips, as severe pains shot through his shoulders and spine. Knowing that he could not run, and doubting if he could even walk, he turned on his hands and knees, and, much to his joy, felt the blade of his knife.

Grasping it firmly, he rolled over and over down the decline into a clump of cedars, where, after a short time, he ascertained, by a vigorous rubbing, that he could stand upon his feet. He then staggered away toward the range, among the bowlders and dwarf pines each, moment feeling more and more like his delectable self.

Once clear of the town Pete was greatly relieved, but at the same time much troubled at the loss of his horse; but while thinking how he could best remedy this, a man sprung from the pines directly against him—the new-comer evidently as much surprised and alarmed as himself.

By the impulse of the moment Pete grappled with the stranger, and the next instant each, with knife in hand, the two men were in deadly conflict.

Neither spoke a word as they struggled back and forth for some time, until at last both became weak from their exertions, and Pete disengaged his right arm by a dexterous movement, and delivered a terrible blow, his fist striking his antagonist between the eyes, Pete having dropped his bowie-knife in the struggle.

The man fell senseless, and Pete, appropriating the knife and revolvers of his prostrate foe, dragged the latter out into the moonlight.

"Jist es I sposed," he muttered; "hit's Bowlder Bill. I mought 'a' know'd he'd be this-a-ways. Ef I knife him, an' ther cits dis-kiver ther corpse, they'll stompede arter me. I'll skute."

Suiting the action to the word, the worthy ran on toward the south-west, but, before he had placed half a mile between him and Big Medicine City, in his headlong haste he tripped against a stone and fell to the earth, where he lay as limp and senseless as his late adversary, Bowlder Bill.

"Taos Tim! Give the boys whatever they wish—all hands. It's my 'set 'em up'!"

Thus spoke Square Sim, as he entered the bar-room, followed by the crowd of citizens.

"Pards," he added, as the bar-keeper slid the glasses up and down the counter, "I know it seems wrong to allow Pete to go free, for everything is dead against his being anyways 'square.' I've no doubt that he deserves hanging the worst sort. But you see how it is."

"I give ther clean fac's cl'ar through ther hull biz," said Jim Jams, as with shaky hands he poured out a full glass. "I see'd ther cuss war workin' round fer a row, an' he gut it. He mought 'a' know'd he'd gut ter buck ag'in' me an' Bowlder Bill ef he laid his paw on ther dandy from Denver, 'specially arter I had christened him."

The citizens exchanged winks as Jim Jams spoke.

"Where do you bury your dead, Jim?" asked Tim.

"I never plants 'em. I jist 'lows 'em ter lay roun' permiscus-like fer kiote lunch."

A laugh followed this reply, and Jim Jams added:

"I never 'lows no pilgrim ter rip up my tender feelin's without he sots out n'ison fust off. I'm a sensertive individ' when I'm dry. I'm only a grief-struck relic of a human anyways. I'm forced ter rustle 'round from bar ter bar in my gentle, unobtrusive way, prospectin' fer fluids, but often gits ther 'grand shake' when a fresh calls ther pilgrims up ter clutch crystals. My make-up an' gin'ral 'pearance air dead ag'in' me."

"Thunder an' blazes, Jim Jams!" said one of the miners; "don't be so cussed thin-skinned. I'm one o' ther best friends yer gut on ther range, an' I tell ye yer orter cut clear from whisk' anyway."

For some time the citizens stood at the bar conversing in regard to the events of the night, not one giving a thought to Pueblo Pete.

Several rounds of drinks were ordered, and Jim Jams, having indulged much more than was usual with him, returned to his old and favorite position on the bench, where he fell asleep.

A sound of heavy footsteps was the next diversion; and Bowlder Bill, hatless and with his unkempt hair standing out in all directions, staggered around the screen. Relinquishing his hold upon it, Bill reeled into the bar, and brought his huge fist down upon the same with terrific force, while the crowd looked on in silence.

"Feller-cits!" yelled Bill; "I've bin snatched bald-headed! I've bin salervated! I've bin waltzin' on ther wrong eend! I've slid down ther range on my ear, an' hit doesn't need no afterdavy ter prove hit! Yer needn't 'dress me es Bowlder Bill nary time ag'in. Hit's too hard a name fer sich a dang'd soft. Whar's Pete?"

"Reckon he's dead," replied the sheriff. "We left him laid out stiff under the tree. Where in the name of wonder have you been, Bill?"

"I'm a-reckonin' yer'll hev a funeral without a corpse, ef yer hes bin countin' on Pete," said Bill, in a hoarse voice. "He's jist ther liveliest 'stiff' I ever bucked ag'in. Give me sum whisk', Tim, afore I wilt inter my boots."

Square Sim, followed by most of the citizens, rushed out into the street, and then to the tree beneath which they had left Pueblo Pete, more dead than alive as they supposed, but who had, as the reader knows, decamped.

All returned in haste to Placer Palace, where they found Bill seated on the bench, while Taos Tim was bathing his head, and applying plaster. Bill soon began to look more natural.

"Pete is gone, as I inferred from your words he had, Bill," said the sheriff. "Now tell us what has happened. The scoundrel will join the Wild Cats now, without our having gained any knowledge as to their hiding-place, by following him as we had proposed. We were foolish to have left him. I ought to have placed a guard."

"Ya-as," said Bill; "he's levanted, dead sure, an' tuck my shooters 'long with him. Dod-blast ther galoot! Ef I ever gits a squar' squint at him ag'in, I'll fill his carkiss as full o' holes as a porous plaster. You hear me? I'm a talkin' simon-pure biz, now, pards!"

"Where did you run against him?" asked Sim.

"Thar's whar yer hes gut hit right in solid bed-rock English! I did run flop ag'in' him. I war a-comin' from Big Med's locate, an' ther pine 'motte war pesky dark es I blundered through, an' run inter ther cuss. He friz ont'er me, an' we hed a hefty tussle. Arter a while he gut one arm loose, an' knocked me clean out o' New Mex'. G'in me another dose o' terrantal juice, Tim; I wants ter git my head cl'ar, an' then I'm a-goin' ter rip up ther whole range ter find ther dog-goned long-legged cuss what's gut my shooters. Dang my cats! Hyer's ther man fer my nuggets!"

The last words of Bowlder Bill were spoken as Big Medicine, the Kioway, stalked around the screen, and stood gazing with stoical countenance upon the assemblage.

"How is Diamond Dick?" asked Sim quickly.

"Kick high when sun come. Mebbe so one hour," was the reply of the Indian.

Bowlder Bill passed him a glass of whisky, saying:

"Drink that, Big Med', then skute roun' an' find Puebla Pete's trail fer me, an' I'll gi'n yer a new rifle an' ten poun's o' terback. Yer'll be doin' a big favor ter ther burg. What does yer say?"

"Big Medicine will find trail. He follow Pete."

With these words, the Indian stalked to the door, passed around to the rear of Placer Palace and disappeared among the rocks, the citizens following him from the bar, and watching him while he continued in view.

"Feller cits o' New Mex'," said Bowlder Bill. "Yer hed better snatch a few winks o' sleep. I'm goin' ter see how pard Dick air sitervated. Thar's bloody biz ahead for us, er I air ther mistakenist monkey in ther mines."

With these parting words, Bill started toward the lodge of the Kioway; but, feeling weak, he returned to Placer Palace, deciding to allow

Diamond Dick the rest which the latter so much needed, until such a time as a movement was made toward the West, or some information should be gained in regard to the trail of Pueblo Pete.

CHAPTER XII. IN HER POWER.

WHEN Big Medicine entered Placer Palace, he was as well informed in regard to the disappearance of Pete, and the contest between the latter and Bowlder Bill, as any man at the bar, for he had, as he left his retreat, observed Bill stagger from the shadows of the *motte* toward the shanties.

Descending the decline, the Indian had inspected the clump of pines, discovered the signs of the late encounter, and falling upon his hands and knees, and gazing over the grass, saw where the heavy dew had been brushed off its long blades where Pueblo Pete had passed, leaving his trail well defined.

When he reached the scene of the hanging and saw that Pete was gone, he was satisfied as to the identity of one of the parties; and, when he entered the bar room, he knew that Bowlder Bill must be the other, judging from his general appearance.

In consequence of this, when the Kioway left the town, he went directly to the trail which he had seen. Stealthily he proceeded along, for he knew that the man he followed must be greatly fatigued and broken up from the usage he had received at the hands of the citizens. He was soon brought to a halt by a heavy groan in front.

Gliding behind a clump of cedars, he passed silently through them to the opposite side, when parting the branches, he saw Pueblo Pete in the act of rising from the ground.

Rubbing his forehead and eyes, as if trying to recall the near past, the outlaw then felt around his belt, as if to test the truth of some thoughts that ruled his mind for the moment, and then drew a long sigh of relief. This was soon followed, however, by a sudden start of surprise—a feeling which the Kioway also partook of—for both heard the report of fire-arms toward the North-west.

These sounds, at that time and place, indicated, almost to a certainty, that men were engaged in fierce fight; and Pete hastened on toward the point from which it proceeded.

Big Medicine at once concluded that the party of miners who had gone to assist and protect Dolores in the pursuit of the stranger, must have fallen in with the "bad whites," called the Wild Cats, of whom he had heard so much of late.

Knowing that the citizens were all very anxious to discover the haunt of these outlaws, the Kioway was much pleased at the prospect of gaining the information that was of such importance to his white friends; he therefore stole on after Pueblo Pete, taking care that the latter did not observe him. Pete increased his pace to long strides, the Indian, however, keeping within view of him.

It was evident to Big Medicine, from the manner of Pete, that he was confident his friends were the stronger party in the conflict that was going on; and as Pete's friends were beyond a doubt the Wild Cats, the Indian now felt certain of discovering their retreat.

On went the outlaw, close followed by the red spy, until both were suddenly brought to a halt by a rattling discharge of fire-arms but a short distance ahead of them. Knowing well the lay of the land, the Kioway located the sounds of the fight as proceeding from a canyon that extended nearly to Big Medicine City.

Only for a moment, however, did Pete halt and listen; then he broke into a wild run, and soon disappeared from view.

Big Medicine followed rapidly, but with due caution, and soon came to where a fringe of bushes lined the edge of the canyon. Parting these he looked downward and saw the horde of masked riders in the bed of the deep chasm, the bandits being at this moment firing their rifles upward to the bank opposite to him.

Glancing across the canyon, the Indian saw Dashing Dolores and the miners urging their horses up the trail to the plain above, and knew that they were now safe. The dead miner and his horse at the bottom of the canyon explained the shots which he and Pete had heard.

Big Medicine was, however, plunged into deep concern, as Dolores foolishly rode to the brink of the canyon, and waved her sombrero in a taunting manner; and his heart sprung to his throat when the rifles of the Wild Cats flashed, and their sounding reports echoed up and down the ravine. Looking down again into the bed of the chasm, the Kioway, much to his surprise, saw Pueblo Pete run into the very midst of the bandits.

His arrival was greeted with yells of joy; and, approaching his chief, he delivered the letter that had been the direct means of his being saved from death by the rope.

The Indian had understood enough of the conversation between the citizens to know that the latter had depended upon this to gain intelligence of the location of the cave of the Wild

Cats, and he now realized that all the facts to be gained in regard to the retreat of the bandits depended upon himself.

The attention of the Kioway was again drawn to the plain, where he saw the miners crawling to the edge of the steep bank for the purpose of shooting down at the bandits.

Something of more importance to him than even this now drew his gaze, for he next saw Dolores urging her horse away from her friends, and when a couple of rifle-shots from the trail, putting him to his topmost speed and galloping along the bank to the north-west.

The Kioway was determined to learn something in regard to the intentions of Dolores, and he felt positive that the bandits would proceed up the canyon, and in this event he could watch their movements and hers at the same time. He soon decided what he would do.

Being fleet of foot, the Kioway, by a short cut, soon reached the canyon where Dashing Dolores had halted at the first sight of the outlaws, and where she had shot Reckless Rube and then escaped capture by her daring and adroit retreat.

As Big Medicine reached the canyon and looked across at the plain, no living object was within the scope of vision as far as he could discern; but, as he was about to step forward nearer to the edge of the abyss and inspect the same, a moving figure caught his keen eye and riveted his attention to the opposite bank.

He soon recognized the outlines of the black horse of Diamond Dick, which Dolores had ridden, the head of the animal having been bent to earth in the act of grazing when he first swept the view.

The Indian at once decided that Dolores was not with the horse, and he sprung forward and quickly glanced down to the bed of the canyon, where a sight met his gaze which filled him with wonder.

Three living objects were below him—a horse, a man and a woman. The latter he knew to be Dashing Dolores, although in what manner she had gained the bed of the canyon was a mystery. It was a strange sight that the Kioway gazed down upon, and it was little wonder that even a stolid Indian was amazed.

Distant, though he was, Big Medicine saw that Dolores was filled with the most furious passion, as she stood over a prostrate man, who lay, his features contorted with agony and evidently severely wounded, upon the ground before her.

But a few yards from them was a horse, fully equipped and secured by his bridle to a bush, from which he was prancing and snorting in his efforts to get free.

The Kioway was perplexed. He felt sure that the Wild Cats would soon gallop up the canyon, and Dolores would meet capture or death, and yet he was powerless to aid her.

That the girl intended to evade being captured was evident from the fact that she had left her horse near the opposite bank. Big Medicine concluded to await developments, and prepared, meantime, to shoot down the first man who should approach Dolores with other than friendly intent.

All this time Dolores was bending over the wounded man, and in her hand a coiled lasso. With a cry of exultation, she proceeded to bind his hands. As the form and features of the infuriated girl met his view, her cry pierced his ears, and the rope was drawn tight, the helpless wretch cried out in horror and agony; but Dolores, apparently bearing in mind the probable return of the Wild Cats, took no notice of the cries of her captive, who, as the moon for a moment lit up his face, was recognized by the Indian as the stranger who had dashed through the "city," and whom Dolores had called by the name of Reckless Rube.

From what he now saw, and from what he had previously heard, Big Medicine knew that this was the man who had greatly wronged the fair girl, and that she was now bent on revenge.

With a strength born of insane fury she dragged Reckless Rube up an inclined bank of clay, placing him upon the opposite and abrupt side of the same; she then sprung to her horse, detached the reins from the bush, and quickly vaulted into the saddle where she sat for a moment listening intently.

As Dolores sat thus, Big Medicine revealed himself to her view on the verge of the canyon, and called to her:

"Why is my white sister on war-path? What does she in canyon when moon shines, and bad white men who hide their faces, ride fast from south trail? The heart of Big Medicine is sad. He will be glad once more when his white sister is in her log lodge by the mountain."

Dashing Dolores gave one quick glance of intense surprise and alarm, as the voice of the Indian broke on her ear; then, as she recognized his well known form and speech, an expression of the greatest relief was stamped upon her face, but before she could find words to reply, the Kioway made a quick, impatient gesture of alarm, uttered a cry of caution, and then sunk back from view.

At the same time, Dolores heard the clatter of hoofs, indicating the approach of the outlaw

band; and urging her horse to the bank, his back being upon a level with the same, without dismounting she drew her captive before her, slipping back herself upon the blanket fender of the saddle, with the head of Reckless Rube hanging over one side and his feet the other. Then, striking her horse a blow with her revolver, the animal being still terribly frightened, darted off with his double load, and up the canyon at terrific speed.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIAMOND DICK ON THE TRAIL.

HALF an hour had passed after Big Medicine had left Diamond Dick in the lodge, when the latter with a start sprung to his feet, having for the time lost sight entirely of his present whereabouts and condition.

Groping about, he found his hat and rifle, as also his revolver and belt, and in another moment was again ready for business. Leaving the lodge, he crossed the level sward, passed between the huge boulders, and stood for a short time gazing at the two rows of shanties that made up Big Medicine City.

While thus standing in the moonlight, all around being silent as the tomb, he heard the far-away report of rifles, which gave him a start of surprise.

Listening until he was satisfied he was not mistaken, he bounded down the decline, and in a short space of time, sprung into the bar of Placer Palace.

"Dang my cats!" exclaimed Bowlder Bill, in astonishment: "ef thar ain't Diamond Dick! Thought yer war wilted, pard; but dog'd ef yer don't pear es peart an' sassy es a fresh roped mustang!"

"Dick," said Square Sim, "I'm glad to see you out so soon, and as Bill says, looking yourself again."

"Thanks, gentlemen. I'm quite as much rejoiced as you are. But please to inform me what has transpired since I've been in the hands of my warm friend, Big Medicine. Where is my horse, landlord?"

"Dashing Dolores appropriated him, and went off at full speed after the man who shadowed you at Denver. She recognized him, I think, as one whom she had good cause to hate. She fired at him, after you fell from your horse in a faint, missed him, and then started on your nag in full pursuit."

"Where is Big Medicine?" asked Dick, quickly.

"He's levanted fer sign o' Pueblo Pete," answered Bill. "Pete skuted, arter givin' me a lively tussle, when I war comin' back arter helpin' ter tote yer ter ther lodge."

"Then that explains it," said Dick. "I have just heard the report of rifles toward the north-west. Sheriff, I must have a good horse instantly! Don't be afraid, I will pay you well for the animal."

"Dang my purty pictur!" cried Bill; "ef yer heard shootin', I'm a bettin' they've run ag'in' ther dang'd maskers. Pards, we-uns must crawl our stock, an' git. Ef they hurts ther gal, I won't eat nor snooze till I make ther bull gang turn up toes!"

Just then Jim Jams awoke, and rubbing his eyes, soon got a glimpse of Diamond Dick, when he staggered to his feet, brightening at the prospect of a drink.

"Dick, gin us yer paw! I hopes nobody'll ever 'vite me ter irrigate, ef hit don't do me a heap o' good to gaze at yer ban'box make up!"

"Howdy, Jim, old boy?" said Dick. "Take a drink, and excuse me, for I have business on hand."

So saying, and grasping his riding-whip, which Taos Tim had taken in charge, he added, hurriedly:

"Now, my friends, find horse-meat and we'll travel. A moment's delay may cost a life. Bill, I will not ask you to go, for you look pretty well used up."

"Never you mind my condish, Dick," said Bill, "I'm on this lyer trail ef I hes ter crawl. Come, Sim: we'll hev some nags at ther door in ther wag of a alligator gar's tail!" and the speaker, accompanied by the sheriff, dashed out into the street.

"Git a hoss fer mel!" yelled Jim Jams. "I'm a wo'thless cuss, but my carkiss kin stop a lead pill."

"All right, Jim," said our hero; "you may be useful if you'll only brace up. Give him a bottle of good liquor to take along, Taos Tim; the poor fellow will need it to prevent his ideas from getting mixed. But don't you think it would be better to awaken some of the citizens? We may have a large force of the Wild Cats to contend against."

"Certainly, Dick! The boys would be ripping mad, if they were not informed of the racket."

Out darted Taos Tim, and aroused the miners with a yell. These were soon ready for action when they found what was required of them.

Dick, followed by Sim, Bill, and Jim Jams, galloped away from Placer Palace, passing around the head of the canyon and speeding over the plain to the south, all armed to the teeth, with Jim Jams grasping a rifle in one hand, and a bottle of whisky in the other. Not a word was spoken. All spurred like men in

battle charge, following Diamond Dick as their leader toward the retreat of the Kioway; he having decided mentally the direction to travel in order to reach the scene of the firing, and forming his conclusions from the sounds he had heard as he left the lodge.

But a short time did they proceed thus at full gallop, when a party of five horsemen were seen to their right, near the canyon, and Dick quickly guided his horse into their midst, knowing by their yells and gestures that they were the miners who had gone out to protect Dolores.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, touching his hat as he drew rein; "what has occurred? I heard firing just now. Have you seen the girl, or the Indian?"

Soon the details of the chase and fight were related, and the strange disappearance of Dashing Dolores.

All were filled with surprise and concern.

"Have you found her trail, boys?" asked Sim.

"Ya-as; she p'inted up ther canyon bank, ridin' a heavy hoss what war fresh shod, an' left some sign in spots."

"Did she have my horse?" inquired Dick.

"Ya-as," replied another of the miners.

"Have you seen Big Medicine, any of you?"

"Nary Big Med," was the answer.

"Where did the Wild Cats point, and how many are there?" demanded Dick, urging on his horse as he spoke.

"They hes levanted up ther canyon. Thar war nigh onter twenty, but I reckon we sent 'bout a quarter on 'em 'over ther range," countin' what Dolores "bored." She said she put a ball inter ther cuss what skated through our burg, an' I'm a gamblin' thet thet's her biz up country. She wants ter make a dead sure thing on cuttin' off ther wind o' thet Reckless Rube, es she called him. She hes 'bout a half-dozen devils in her peepers when anybody slings a word 'bout ther spy from Denver. Reckon he's ther human what she's bin so danged eager ter run ag'in' for some consider'ble moons."

"Was Captain Halfhand with these bandits?" inquired Dick, who had pulled rein to hear what the miners had to say.

"Ya-as! he held his reg'lar persish, es king-pin o' ther Wild Cats," was the reply.

The young man waited to hear no more; but, regardless of the reasonings and warnings of Square Sim and the citizens, who knew that further action against the bandits was for the time useless and dangerous, he urged his horse down the trail into the canyon, and then spurred at headlong speed up the chasm, followed only by Jim Jams, who was only eager to prove to the dandy from Denver that he was true to the last.

That the advance of Dick up the canyon was both foolish and dangerous, and without probable chance of any success toward the capture of the Wild Cats, or the rescue of Dolores, was plain to the sheriff and the citizens; indeed they all felt sure it would defer, if not defeat any plan which, upon reflection, they might adopt toward a combination of available forces, and an advance up the range.

However, Square Sim admitted that possibly Dick might gain some knowledge in regard to the movements or fate of Dashing Dolores, and also of the outlaws, should he escape being shot down by some lurking assassin, or killed in his mad, reckless gallop by coming suddenly into the midst of the Wild Cats, as he turned one of the many curves in the canyon. The absence of Big Medicine, and the fact that none of the citizens who had been in the fight and retreat had seen the Kioway, led them all to believe that the Indian would follow, and ascertain the location of the stronghold of the bandits.

Boulder Bill, after the departure of Dick and Jim Jams, sat his horse for some moments in a state of bewilderment; then, throwing all prudence to the winds, he spurred his steed away from the citizens toward the north-west, along the bank of the canyon, in an endeavor to keep watch of the movements of the dashing dandy from Denver, who had so favorably impressed him from the first.

Square Sim and the citizens, amazed at the foolishness of Diamond Dick and his two followers, lariat their animals to grass on the plain, and proceeded down the trail to bury their dead townsmen, whose remains the survivors of the party pointed out, and all held themselves in readiness at a moment's notice, to gallop to the assistance of their reckless friends.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT HAY.

HANGING in a torturing position, suffering agonies from the bullet wound in his shoulder, which was rendered doubly painful by the way in which he was bound and the violent motion of the steed, the bandit spy, whom Dashing Dolores had captured, gave vent to deep groans at every bound of the steed. But these sounds were the sweetest music to the girl whom he had wronged, and she laughed in glee, laughed with a wicked, metallic ring that caused Reckless Rube to shudder, for the laugh proved to him that he was in the power of a woman whom his villainy had driven to insanity.

Little hope had he of escape, for he had, in his great suffering, failed to hear the clattering hoofs of the approaching Wild Cats. It mattered little, however, for soon his cunning captor turned into a narrow branch of the canyon formed by the mountain torrents, and left all danger far behind her.

Big Medicine had followed in a wild run, in hopes of getting speech with the girl, and inducing her to abandon her horse and captive, and save herself from the death which, he felt sure, awaited her.

Losing sight of them, the Kioway arrived at the wash-out, and with difficulty clambered down its side.

Halting a moment in the bed of the gully, the Indian detected the sound of a horse fast galloping toward the range, along the narrow passage.

Feeling positive that Dolores had left the canyon, the Kioway climbed the west bank, and concealing himself in the little thicket, awaited the approach of the Wild Cats. He had not long to wait. Soon he discovered, coming up the canyon at an easy lope, the masked riders, some of whom were leading horses on which were bound those of their number who had fallen in their encounter with the citizens. Just to the west of his position was a large basin, of several acres in extent, and into which the canyon led. In its banks were several large openings, marking the entrance to huge wash-outs; but these were nearly concealed by the cacti and scrubby mesquite which grew in profusion.

When the bandits reached this point, the leading horseman slacked up, those in the rear with the corpses of the slain turning to the right, evidently with the intention of burying their dead.

Big Medicine scanned closely the bad whites as they rode beneath his covert, and to his surprise failed to discover Pueblo Pete among the ranks; but before the burying party joined their comrades, his absence was explained, for he was seen galloping up the canyon and guiding his horse directly to where the bandit chief was, and turning around, gesticulating wildly, as he pointed down the trail along which he had come.

The eyes of all the band were now fixed upon Pueblo Pete and Captain Halfhand, for they saw the latter raise his gloved fist, as he uttered a fierce oath of satisfaction, followed by quickly delivered and imperative words of command.

Before Big Medicine had recovered from his surprise at this, he saw the band divide and secrete themselves within the mesquites on either side of the point where the canyon formed a junction with the open basin. Doubly astonished at this new move, the Kioway was now at a loss to conjecture who among his friends could be so imprudent as to follow the bad whites, and ride in this way into the very jaws of death.

With this thought darting through the mind of the Indian spy, his wonder and concern were soon increased, for, coming like a leaf before the gale up the canyon, was his white brother whom he had left in safety in his lodge.

On, on, came Diamond Dick, riding headlong into the death-bordered basin, where nearly a score of cowardly curs were crouched awaiting him with hate and exultation flashing from the holes in their sable masks.

"Take him alive!" yelled the bandit chief. "Death to the man who scratches his hide with ball or knife. Shoot low, and kill his horse!"

These commands, though distinctly heard by Big Medicine, did not reach the ears of the dandy from Denver. The Kioway clutched his rifle, and although trained from childhood to mask his emotions behind a stoical indifference, his face was now frightfully contorted, and a murderous light flashed from his snake-like eyes.

No one had ever made so favorable an impression on his mind as this stranger youth, who had stepped between him and insult—perhaps death—but a few hours before. The man's savage nature was doubly touched, as he witnessed the daring advance of Diamond Dick into unknown regions, where he himself must be well aware that danger lurked, and that death might come at any moment.

Big Medicine had braced himself, prepared to warn his white friend by a death-dealing fusillade from rifle and revolver into the bandit band below, when the words of Captain Halfhand caught his ear and caused him to abandon his desperate plan of warning, for he quickly reasoned that such a course would only insure the death of Dick, who would in that case make an attempt to escape, and thus draw the combined fire of the band, as well as jeopardizing his own life to no purpose.

As matters stood, the young man was to be taken captive, and there was a possibility of rescuing him, and at the same time of discovering the secret retreat of the Wild Cats.

The Kioway sprung to his feet, as the dandy from Denver approached the basin, and stood ready, if aught should occur to show that the orders of the outlaw chief were to pass unheeded, to shoot any one who should harm Dick; and then bound into the basin by way of

the wash out, and sacrifice his own life in avenging his white friend.

Diamond Dick sat erect in his saddle, his bridle-reins hung loosely, and the neck of his horse was outstretched in a line with the animal's back and the ears pricked forward as if suspicious of danger, but galloping on at terrific speed; the rider plainly on the alert, and ready to fight desperately for life at any instant.

The Indian felt positive that Dick's motive could be no other than to save some one from impending danger, and it at once occurred to him that his present rashness was caused by a knowledge that Dolores had galloped up the canyon.

On, however, galloped Diamond Dick. One quick glance ahead showed that the coast was clear; but as the border of mesquites and cacti caught his view, he glanced suspiciously on either side, as his horse bounded from the canyon.

At this moment a dozen rifles belched fire from the shades of the mesquites, and with a piercing shriek, almost human, the steed of our hero sprung into the air, and then fell to the earth, its head thrown forward, and its life-blood spurting from a dozen wounds over the glittering sand.

Gathering himself up in an instant, Dick let fly half a dozen shots from his Winchester rifle, in quick succession, into the crescent of masked riders, who now galloped from the mesquites.

Wild yells of command, mingled with groans, filled the night air; for Big Medicine, timing his movements by those of Dick, also fired as many shots from his covert on the bank above—the two killing several bandits, wounding many more, together with their horses, and filling the survivors with consternation. Casting his empty rifle to the earth, our hero now drew a revolver in each hand, and stepping backward, stood ready to pour a hurtling shower of leaden death into the bandit horde.

Dumfounded at the sight of their dead, and at thus being held at bay by a mere youth, who, as they had been told by their chief, was a "fresh" from the States, the Wild Cats were for the moment incapable of action; but yells and curses soon burst from the throats of the survivors, and as one man they rushed toward the dashing dandy from Denver.

At this critical moment, a coal-black horse came dashing at terrific speed over the sands, and was guided between Diamond Dick and the outlaws.

None could fail to perceive by the form of the new-comer, and her long flowing hair, that she was a woman, notwithstanding the fact that she was attired in close-fitting trousers and a jacket of black velvet, and wore jauntily upon her head a sombrero, the hue of which matched her horse, and her long sable plume upon which was held in place by a silver star. In each hand she held a revolver.

"Back, cowards!" she exclaimed. "The first who pulls a trigger dies! Are you so depraved that you cannot respect desperate daring? Have the Wild Cats turned foot-pads, in place of 'clearing out' mining towns, and blowing open the express safes of Wells, Fargo & Co.?"

CHAPTER XV.

COME AND GONE.

It was a terrible, but a grand and imposing sight that was presented for a moment, after the sneering words of the fair rider of the sable steed.

Captain Halfhand, with but a remnant of his band, came to a halt, and stood bewildered and furious.

Behind them lay dead and dying men and horses, groaning and struggling, while in their front gleamed the deadly tubes held in the firm hands of a beautiful woman. There, too, stood Diamond Dick, still braced for fight, grasping his revolvers, and his gaze frozen upon the one who had thus suddenly come between him and the certain death that awaited him.

Far above, his rifle ready, stood Big Medicine, looking down upon the strange scene; a scene soon to be changed once more, for a yell sounded from the south-east side of the basin, and Boulder Bill appeared, leading the black horse of Diamond Dick.

As Bill whirled his lariat high in air, and allowed it to fall to the earth, both Dick and the Kioway comprehended his object. The former gave a peculiar signal, and his noble steed quickly slid down the bank, and galloped toward his master. At the same instant, from one of the dark chasms in the bank, bounded Dashing Dolores at headlong speed, her long hair flying behind her, and her eyes blazing with insane fury. As the girl dashed past, she discharged her rifle, bringing the horse upon which the bandit chief sat to earth, as well as his master; and Boulder Bill, who had gained a position within range, let fly half-a-dozen shots in quick succession into the outlaw band from the rear.

Thinking themselves attacked by a force of miners from Big Medicine City, the Wild Cats whirled in their tracks to defend themselves, thus giving Diamond Dick an opportunity to spring upon the back of his horse, which now bounded to his side.

Just then, a sound of deafening yells came

from the west, and turning, Dick saw a score of masked riders dashing over the bed of the basin toward him, at great speed. Before he had time to think what move to make Dashing Dolores sprung toward him on her horse, yelling:

"Follow me, and spur for your life!"

As this command left her lips, Dolores struck the hams of Dick's horse with her rifle, and before our hero could comprehend in what manner they could possibly escape, he found himself speeding through darkness, only relieved by a narrow ribbon of starry sky over his head.

Dick felt that he had twice been saved from being riddled with bullets, and each time by a woman. First, by one whom he hated and abhorred more than any poisonous snake, and last by one in whose eyes blazed the terrible light of madness. His chief object in following the canyon had been to save Dolores; but she had turned the tables and saved him.

He remembered faintly having seen this girl at the lynching of Pueblo Pete, and also that she had kindly nursed him at her cabin after he had been rendered senseless by the bullet. He had likewise been informed that Dolores had killed the man, Cache Charley, who had fired the coward shot. Now, he felt, from the expression of her face, her acts and manner, that she had more than a mere passing interest in his welfare. This conclusion, which was forced upon Dick, pained him exceedingly, for he wanted no human being to come between him and the duty he had set before himself.

All the love the young man had ever felt, aside from the affection which he lavished upon those of his own household, had been for the aunt and cousins whom he had sworn to avenge—for the dear ones who had been driven to despair, insanity and death by the same beautiful, but fiendish woman who, a few moments past, had saved him from the bullets of the bandits.

As Diamond Dick wheeled his horse to follow his strange guide, Captain Halfhand regained command of himself, and yelled in fury:

"Ride aside, Lucile! Ride aside! You are mad! Back, I say! You are shielding your own worst foe, and mine—George McClellan!"

At this the face of the beautiful woman changed its expression to one of hatred and rage, and she whirled her horse to follow the fugitives, but, in the confusion which had succeeded their flight, a horseman rode at break-neck speed against her as she wheeled, and she fell senseless from her saddle to the ground, her white face, with the fiendish look frozen upon it, upturned to the moonlight.

When Captain Halfhand, the man whom Diamond Dick well knew to be George Holbrook—his own uncle by marriage—yelled his orders for the woman Lucile Luzerne to ride aside, at the same time calling her by name, then it was, that the words catching the ears of the young man as he galloped off, he realized that the two whom he most detested of any on earth, the two whom he had sworn to hunt to the bitter end, had both stood before him, and that for the time he had been incapable of action. He then berated his weakness, regretting that he had not sprung to one side of the wretched adventuress, and shot Holbrook in his tracks, even if he himself should have fallen in the attempt.

Never, from the first had he entertained the thought of personal violence toward Lucile Luzerne. His respect for the sex to which she belonged forbade it. But he had vowed to make her bitterly regret the day she was born, or the day she first met George Holbrook.

Now that he recalled the tone of voice in which Captain Halfhand had spoken to this woman, for whom, in his infatuation, he had sacrificed wife and children, the young man felt that the feeling had already given place to one of fear or aversion, and that the exciting life which they now led in common was the only tie between them.

Dick now saw that it would be an extremely difficult task to ascertain the location of the secret stronghold of the Wild Cats, as they would now move with great stealth and take every precaution to mislead or conceal their movements.

He had observed his friend the Kioway firing from the high bank, his warning whoop had sounded afar, and Dick had some hope that Big Medicine or Bowlder Bill would watch and follow the bandits without the latter having any suspicion that spies were on their trail. One fact often crowded into his mind, and caused him deep annoyance and anger. It was the knowledge that there was some person at his old home who had learned of his departure for the West, and the object of his journey.

The letter found upon Cache Charley proved this plainly, as well as their sending a spy to Denver to watch for him. Already he felt that the guilty pair must be feeling the first pangs of his sworn revenge. In time, he believed, the consciences of both would be racked and tortured, but he was still resolved that he would bear a hand in the business and hasten the denouement, for he felt not like leaving his grist in the famous "mills of the gods."

While these thoughts flew through his brain, the young man was scarce conscious of his sur-

roundings. All at once he was brought back to the living present by his horse stumbling to its knees in the darkness, as he plunged through the "wash-out." Blaming himself for not having spoken to his noble steed, from which he had been for some hours separated, and which had been instrumental in saving his life, Dick leaned forward, patted the animal's neck, and spoke soft words, which were acknowledged by its turning its head around, and rubbing it against his hand.

High above him now was a narrow ribbon of sky, which seemed to prove that the "wash-out" was of great depth, or else that it was much narrower at the surface of the earth than at its bed. Dick listened for a moment intently, but all was silent; nothing but the panting of his horse and the beating of his own heart could be heard. Surprised, he called out:

"Dolores! O-o-o-oh! Dolores!"

Still the same silence reigned in the deep, dark, winding "wash-out."

Our hero was forced to admit that he was alone, and that Dashing Dolores had deserted him.

He reasoned that, probably, the girl upon becoming calm, had felt mortified at having so plainly betrayed her feelings; which, although perhaps not observed by others, or if they were, her actions and appearance attributed to a different cause, would, nevertheless, be strongly felt by herself.

Now that Dolores had vanished as mysteriously as she had previously appeared, Diamond Dick was in a quandary as to the future.

His main object, henceforth, was to trace the Wild Cats to their lair; but he knew it would be useless to make the attempt at a time when they were maddened by their recent losses, and the escape of those who had succeeded in killing many of their number, as also of their horses, in a perfectly miraculous manner.

While thus cogitating, Dick had allowed the bridle reins to drop over the horn of the saddle; and his intelligent horse, after stumbling, had arisen, and unnoticed by its master, slowly turned about and retraced its steps toward the basin.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE QUEEN OF THE WILD CATS.

AS Dashing Dolores and Diamond Dick disappeared in the depths of the "wash-out," Bowlder Bill and Big Medicine secreted themselves, rightly judging that the bandits, now reinforced, would be too much excited to make any search for foes.

The Kioway felt positive that he had not been observed; and Bill, having left his horse in a secure hiding-place, crawled through the mesquites and across the bed of the canyon to the "wash-out," up which Dolores had passed.

Climbing up the bank, Bill joined his red pard, first, however, giving him a signal of his approach.

"Dog my cats an' kittens, Big Med!" said Bill, "ain't this ther liveliest leetle fandang' yer ever kicked a foot at? Didn't Dolores waltz off though? She's a daisy—dang'd ef she ain't! But dang my skin ef ther range ain't chuck full o' Wild Cats, an' they'll be a thunderin' sight wilder arter ter-night. Who war ther fancy she duck in jacket an' breeches thet war sent ter ther sand so lively?"

"That squaw. Dress like warrior," said the Indian.

"Wa-al, she stood ther rifle like a little man, 'most equiler Dolores; an' I'd 'a' bet heavy ther' warn't another shemal in er out o' New Mex' thet hed es much sand. Dang my pictur', what a cirkuss!"

"Two war-party, bad white men," said the Kioway. "She chief one. Halfhand, he chief other. Heap Half-hand braves give death-yell. Some much sick. Some go on long dark trail when sun come."

While the two pards were speaking, the party of masked riders, who had just galloped up, gathered about the prostrate form of the Woman in Black.

Lucile Luzerne had received no serious injury, having been merely stunned by the fall. She now opened her eyes and looked around upon the dead and dying, then covering her face with her hands, the bandit queen indulged in deep thought, while the rough, brutal men, who surrounded her, looked on in deep respect and admiration of her bravery and will.

"Can it be possible," she muttered, in a whisper, "that the brave youth for whom I risked my life, that he laid his hands upon me in violence? Can it be that he attempted my life and then fled? Ah! I remember. Halfhand revealed my name. But even so, the hatred which George McClellan bears me, and which I deserve, would not surely carry him to that extreme. Has he traced us, I wonder, to this far-away land, that he may carry out a vow of vengeance? Have the Fates guided him? Heavens, how he has changed! From a wayward boy to that daring youth above the common stature of men. And he will keep his oath. Half-hand is doomed. But I cannot believe that George would harm a woman. I will believe nothing cowardly of him. Oh, Lucile Luzerne! Are you falling in love with him

now, as you did once to your ruin, with his uncle, whom you now detest more and more every day that you live?"

Rising at once to her feet, she demanded:

"Which way did they go?"

"Yunder side," said one, as he pointed north. "They jist skuted inter thet wash-out on ther whiz!"

"Did none of you try to capture them?"

"Mout es well 'a' tried ter kerral a streak o' chain-lightnin'. An' thet ain't all. We're in a tight box hyer, for ther folkses from Big Medicine City must 'a' heerd ther shootin', an' they'll levant up this-a-ways."

In a clear, ringing voice, and as if nothing unusual had occurred, Lucile cried out:

"Half-a-dozen of you lasso the loose horses and lead them here! Get the wounded upon the animals and take the arms from the dead! Where is Captain Halfhand? He has proved himself incapable of commanding even the few men he had left. Move lively! We are in danger of attack. Another such fight would blot out the Wild Cats forever. Halfhand was a fool to allow two men—for that is all that were seen—to hold their own against him, and deal out death to nearly all his band!"

The orders of the Woman in Black were obeyed.

"Hyers Captain Halfhand!" called out one of the men.

Lucile Luzerne spurred at once toward the spot.

"He's hurt," said the bandit, "but I reckon no bones are broke. His nag war shot under him."

"Lift him up and give him a drink!" commanded the bandit queen.

A large dose of brandy was administered to the captain, which soon revived him, and he sat up and viewed the scene in great rage. Meeting the look of scorn and contempt in the glance of Lucile, he sprung to his feet and yelled:

"Where is the man who slew my brave boys? Have you allowed him to escape? Curses on you, Lucile Luzerne, to protect the one who has sworn to have my life!"

"Hold!" she exclaimed, as she spurred her horse forward, and presented her revolver at Halfhand's head. "Dare to call down curses on me, George Holbrook, and I'll shoot you like a dog! I should have known that one so devoid of honor was a craven, a dastard! You have this night shown yourself unable to cope with a mere boy, even with a score of men to back you. Why did you not meet George McClellan openly, in fair fight, and show that you had a fraction of manhood about you? Fume and rage, if you will; your braggadocio will never reinstate you with the Wild Cats. Henceforth I am in sole command, and you must bow to my word and superior will!"

The fury of Captain Halfhand at these words from the lips of the woman who had lured him from home and friends, from virtue and honor, it would be impossible to describe. The white foam flew from his lips. He tore his hair in madness, and then fell to the earth in his rage, tearing up the sward like a wounded beast.

The Wild Cats rushed here and there, obeying the orders of their queen unquestioningly, and feeling that the captain had indeed led his portion of the band to their death, when there was no prospect of gain. Not only this, but they felt sure that, by approaching so near to Big Medicine City, he had jeopardized all their lives, and laid them open to an attack from a force with which they could not hope to contend.

Besides this, there was another danger; they were almost positive that spies were lurking on the margin of the basin, who might follow and discover their retreat. Three enemies were known to be in the vicinity, the disguised young woman, the daring youth who had followed her, and the man who had led the black steed to the border of the basin.

From the words of Lucile Luzerne, as well as from what they had seen, they were forced to the conclusion that this George McClellan was a foe not to be despised, and that he was one who would not be easily foiled.

The outlaws had all been gradually alienated from Captain Halfhand by his gloomy temper, absent-mindedness, and his reluctance to leading them out to capture trains, and intercept stages; such expeditions having of late been planned and led by the Queen of the Wild Cats, as they had dubbed Lucile Luzerne. So it was that they were more pleased than otherwise at the open rupture, which promised to reunite the band under their female leader.

For all this, the bandits were not looking for the order now given by their Queen when all were ready for a move; for they supposed that Captain Halfhand was to accompany them.

"By twos, forward!"

As this command was given by the Woman in Black, she pointed toward the west with her revolver, her sable steed prancing and snorting with fright at the scent of human blood. The order, however, was promptly obeyed; and the Wild Cats, some supporting their wounded comrades upon their horses, rode toward the gloomy chasm by which they had entered the

basin, all filled with surprise that their old leader was to be left behind, for they knew that their Queen, who lingered at the scene of the fight, could not, by herself, get Captain Halfhand upon his horse.

This act on her part occasioned, however, no thoughts of rebellion; or if it did, they were not acted upon, for all were soon in the canyon.

The Queen of the Wild Cats tarried for a minute, and then spoke in a voice of exultation:

"George Holbrook! I leave you to your fate, be it what it may! Since that day when you struck me, I have been planning your downfall, and it has come. I swore to be avenged, and I would have kept my oath, even though it had been by betraying you to the officers of the law. You are a coward, and I have always distrusted you since I have known it. I felt sure that for little cause you would take my life in the same way that you have removed others. Die where you are, you dastard, among those whom you led to their death, and behind whom you hid to avoid the bullets of George McClellan! Die, you worthless cur! The Queen of the Wild Cats leaves you to the buzzards and the wolves. Revenge is sweet. Ha! ha!"

Her taunting laugh sounded fiendish, as she drove spurs into her horse, and sped toward the black opening, after her band.

The wretched man whom she had thus deserted, seemed partially to recover his senses, for he sprang upon his hands and knees, crawled over, and seated himself upon the corpse of one of his men. Then, with a cry that echoed back from crag and cleft in the adjacent mountain he sprang to his feet, yelling out, as the perfidy of the female fiend began to find an entrance into his disordered brain:

"Lucile! Lucile Luzerne! Great God! Lucile! Can it be that she has left me thus? George Holbrook, this desertion is like—no, it is not to be compared, hellish as it is, with deeds of your own! I know—I feel it! Katharine was insane, they said, before she died; and now I feel my own brain scorching. Oh! Katharine, my murdered wife, is this your vengeance? George, Frank, Stella—my children! Are you punishing me now for what I did?"

Then, beating the air, as if fighting off dread shapes, and stopping at times to clutch at his throat and gasp for breath, he arose and staggered along, his eyes fixed upon the bright moon that seemed to burn into his very brain. At last he rushed forward to the spot where Lucile Luzerne's horse had stood, but he stumbled over the body of one of his followers, and fell prone upon the ground, lying as silent and devoid of consciousness as the blood-stained corpse at which he clutched, as his senses were at last mercifully calmed in oblivion.

Boulder Bill and Big Medicine, standing side by side, had watched the movements of the outlaws from the fringe of bushes on the high bank of the basin; but when the band had ridden toward the canyon, followed by their Queen, and Captain Halfhand began to act in such an insane manner, Bill had crept nearer to the edge of the bank, returning to his former position as the outlaw chief had fallen senseless to the earth.

Much to the surprise and annoyance of Bill, when he looked around him again, wishing to confer with Big Medicine, he found that the Kioway had disappeared.

"Dog-gone my cats, kittens, an' ther Wild Cats ter boot!" he muttered, in extreme vexation.

He then bethought himself of the necessity of gaining some reliable information in regard to the retreat of the outlaws, and as he meditated, he decided that he had now an excellent chance to gain all the secrets of the bandits.

He had noted the actions and heard many of the words of the Woman in Black, as she bade farewell to the wounded captain; and he came to the conclusion that there was a rotten plank in the platform of the Wild Cats which could be used to overthrow the band.

His surprise that the outlaw chief should have been left behind in his present condition was great; but Bill did not waste time in thought. He decided upon immediate action in the premises.

When the bandit leader had rushed wildly about with piercing shrieks, the horse which one of the band had considerably left behind for his old chief, had galloped to the shades of the mesquites in great fright, and this had been noticed by Boulder Bill.

He now lost no time in securing the animal, and, loosening a lasso from the horn of the saddle, the miner led the horse at once to the place where he had seen the chief of the Wild Cats fall.

Reaching the side of Captain Halfhand, Bill secured the hands of the former, and then, by using his whole strength, he lifted the bandit into the saddle, fastened him to the same, and led the animal up the nearest "wash-out," in the dark depths of which he lariatied the horse to a shrub, and then seated himself to rest and meditate upon his future course.

Meanwhile he kept hoping that the Indian would soon return and confer with him as to an

advance, or a return to Big Medicine City to secure the services of Square Sim and the citizens.

CHAPTER XVII.

"WELL SHAKEN BEFORE TAKEN."

WE left Diamond Dick in the dark depths of the "wash-out," lost in the bowels of the earth, as well as in thought, and totally ignorant in regard to the direction in which his horse was traveling.

The many tragic and exciting occurrences through which he had passed, combined with the effects of his wound, the meeting with those he had traveled so far to trace, all these made it difficult for him to believe that these experiences had been crowded into one eventful night, and he strove in vain to connect his thoughts in a reasonable manner.

From the moment of his entering Placer Palace, each hour had been pregnant with the most bewildering developments, each in its turn opening out a clear trail toward the fulfillment of his vow of vengeance.

Thus matters seemed to our hero, as his horse walked cautiously along the narrow, winding and dark passage, afar down below the surface of the earth.

Every one he had met, friend or enemy, had proved in some way a helper to him in his search for Holbrook and his paramour; and the very fact that the latter had interposed to save him from death, confirmed Dick in his belief that his guardian angel was watching over him, and leading him on.

The desertion of Dashing Dolores was a mystery, but he began to believe that his being thus left alone was one of the links in the chain of events, which would benefit him in the end.

For some time his noble steed walked on, Dick allowing him to proceed at will, without once touching the bridle; when at last, upon turning a bend in the "wash-out," a silvery brightness ahead, and a wide level of sand spreading out in front of him, caused him to regain his reins, and proceed with caution, though he had no idea that it was the same basin from which he had galloped under the guidance of Dolores.

The high land to his left projected out some distance further than that to his right, and this gave Dick a clear prospect of the western side of the basin, and shut out from view the scene of the fight on the east. Casting a glance now to the west, the young man perceived a fast-galloping horse approaching him. In another second he recognized in its rider, the Woman in Black, who had come between him and the rifles of the bandits.

He saw then that his horse had wandered without guidance, to a point where he could again take up the trail; and he jerked his steed backward just at the moment that Lucile Luzerne glanced to the east, previous to her dashing into the canyon.

His haste had prevented Dick from taking note of the lines in the landscape in his front, consequently he saw nothing that gave him a hint as to his real location; and he was too cautious to advance at once into the moonlight space, lest the Wild Cats might be following after their female leader.

With this resolve, he waited a moment, his eyes directed toward the south, expecting each instant that horsemen would appear. This delay prevented him from discovering Boulder Bill, as the latter secured his captive upon the horse, and hurried with the senseless chief of the outlaws from the basin, thereby saving the latter for the time being.

Had Dick known what was transpiring around the bank to the east, and in the gloomy depths of the canyon to the west, he would have been forced to acknowledge that, although the Fates had thus far been working in his favor, they had suddenly deserted him, or lost their gripe.

Hearing nothing that would indicate that human beings were ahead, Dick loosened the rein, spoke to his horse, and the animal walked slowly out into the moonlight, gradually opening the hitherto hidden portion of the basin into full view.

With an ejaculation of surprise, the young man jerked rein, and sat his steed, his eyes fixed on the scene of the late encounter, not a hundred yards away. One glance however, showed him that no living man or brute was within the scope of vision, and supposing that Boulder Bill and the Kiowa had gone down the canyon to procure the assistance of the citizens, he urged his horse to the west, dashing recklessly into the canyon, in hopes that it might be wide enough in places to give him an occasional sight of Lucile Luzerne, and by following her ascertain the retreat of the Wild Cats.

But the hopes of Diamond Dick were fated to be transformed to regrets most bitter; for, upon turning an abrupt curve, his horse darted from beneath narrow overhanging banks into a wide space, which was brightly illuminated by the moon.

Fearing that he had been imprudent, he halted suddenly, but before he had time to think, or to draw a weapon, the hiss of lassoes cutting the

air from either side caught his ears, and, the same instant, he felt the tightly drawn ropes around his form, and binding his arms to his sides, as in a vise.

While writhing in the coils, his horse meanwhile prancing and snorting with fright, half-a-dozen brutal visaged men rushed from the broken sides of the canyon toward him. Jerked from his saddle and disarmed, Dick now found himself held fast in a standing position in the bed of the canyon, the moon shining brightly down upon him.

His captors uttered not a word, but the ears of the young man were soon tortured by the taunting laugh of Lucile Luzerne, who urged her horse in front of him, her beautiful face filled with triumph.

"George McClellan!" she exclaimed, "we meet again, and under circumstances not as agreeable to yourself, as even I would wish; but I have been forced to it in self-defense. Captain Halfhand showed an ignorance of your character, and it has cost him dear. My men would have shot you like a dog for the disaster and death which you brought upon our band, but I have prevailed upon them to give you a chance for your life. George McClellan, or Diamond Dick, as Pete says you are now dubbed, you were a fool to spend time and money in search of revenge. You are too quixotic, but you are brave and manly, and I regret the necessity of having to treat you as I do."

Straight as an Indian lance stood our hero his eyes flashing contempt and hatred into those of the Woman in Black, as he replied:

"Lucile Luzerne! I was a stupid dolt, to walk, or gallop rather, into your parlor. But, for all that, since I struck this section of country last evening, I flatter myself I have accomplished not a little toward carrying out my purpose of revenge."

"Ah!" said the woman coolly; "but it is my turn now."

"It is not!" he exclaimed. "I do not believe that I was born to be killed by the outlaws of New Mexico, at the orders of the most infamous female fiend that ever cursed civilization. The murderous Apaches are more fitting associates for you than white men. You are fair in face and form, Lucile Luzerne, but the fires of hell are reflected in your eyes. A woman who can boast of having ruined a score of happy families, by luring their protectors from truth and honor, and leaving them to the mercy of strangers, and perchance to starve; and who, to accomplish her hellish aims, has not hesitated to take the lives of innocent babes, deserves only eternal torture."

"Bravo, bravissimo!" burst from the bandit Queen, in genuine admiration, and without the slightest show of anger. "You compliment me highly, George McClellan! You ride a high horse now, my young friend, but in time you will be satisfied with a mangy burro. I never saw a man yet that I could not, if I wished to, bend to my will. When I shall have subdued you, revolutionized your thoughts, aims and feelings, then I shall be supremely proud, for it will be the crowning effort of my life. Holbrook, at his best, was a pining infant compared with you, my lion-hearted youth. You shall yet be captain of the Wild Cats, and I proud to be your loyal slave."

With a silvery laugh as she ended, the Woman in Black sprang forward on her horse to the side of Diamond Dick, and patted his cheek with her hand.

Had a rattlesnake struck its deadly fangs into his face he would not have recoiled with more horror and aversion. As he sprang quickly backward he hurled one of the bandits with great force to the earth, the outlaw, the next instant, with a fierce, vengeful oath, regaining his feet.

Drawing back his arm to strike the captive, the bandit was surprised by the sharp crack of a rifle, and, before his clinched fist struck its mark, he threw up his arms and fell back, his features contorted with hate and the death-agony.

All turned their gaze quickly upward in great alarm, and a score of rifles were at once brought to shoulder, but naught except a slight curl of smoke above the high bank of the canyon could be seen; however, the wild, ringing war-cry of the Kioway sounded loud and clear, causing the Wild Cats to stare at each other in the deepest wonder and alarm.

"To horse! To horse! Bind the captive to his own saddle! Spur deep, men, for Big Medicine is on our trail, and we must mislead him!"

Thus ordered the bandit Queen, in tones that were clear and ringing, and the next minute the outlaw horde were dashing up the canyon to the west, Diamond Dick in their midst, his face, since he had heard the rifle-shot and the war-cry of the Indian, filled with the greatest relief, for he had heard the same yell when surrounded by deadly danger in the basin, and he felt positive that the Kioway, whom he had befriended in Placer Palace, was on the trail, instead of being, as he had hitherto supposed, down the canyon following Square Sim and the citizens of Big Medicine City.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

JIM JAMS, although spurring his horse without mercy, and belaboring him with his rifle, found it impossible to keep Diamond Dick in view. He therefore soon began to seek consolation for this in the bottle with which Taos Tim had provided him at starting. In consequence of this, he soon found it difficult to retain his seat in the saddle, and his horse, left to its guidance, at length turned into a "wash-out" but a short distance below that into which Dolores had disappeared with her captive.

As the shots and yells of the bandits attracted the attention of Jim Jams, he made attempt to reach the scene of action, and at length succeeded in urging his horse at great speed up the "wash-out."

Not long, however, did Jim Jams have the strength or inclination to use his spurs, for he soon fell into a half-unconscious state, with his arms locked around the nag's neck. Soon the animal stopped quickly, with a snort, as if it scented danger, and the same instant a wild shriek rung out from the darkness, seeming to proceed from a human being, and followed by a fierce, deep growl, and the scratching of huge claws upon the rocks.

Trembling in every limb, the terrified steed of Jim Jams reared quickly upon its hind legs, and hurled the poor sot into the cañi at the side of the path; at the instant, a monstrous grizzly bear sprang down the path which led from the chasm, and wound its immense paws about the fear-paralyzed horse. Then came a shriek, a horrible crunching of bones, and the dead steed sunk in the path, the monster of the mountains standing upon the carcass, its jaws dripping with gore, and its claws tearing the warm flesh.

Jim Jams, lying among the prickly pears and pierced by a hundred needle-like points, was soon brought back to consciousness. The poor fellow sat up suddenly, and would have yelled with the intense pain, but the sight which met his eyes made the very hairs upon his head writhe like a mass of entangled serpents. He was utterly incapable of movement, and had it been otherwise, the high rocks in the rear of him would have cut off his retreat.

At length the fierce beast clambered awkwardly over its prey, and grasping the dead horse in its powerful paws, backed down the path, drawing the carcass into a dense thicket of dwarf pines.

Crawling into and up the path toward the rocky chasm, the affrighted inebriate resolved to climb to a safe position before the monster should have brought its feast to a close.

It was only now and then, by flashes of thought, that the incidents of the night were brought to his mind; and between these gleams of intelligence there was such a confused whirl of ideas, faces, forms and objects that poor Jim Jams was in a most pitiable and deplorable condition, for the pains which he suffered from various causes made him at times wish himself dead—although, as he would have expressed it, he preferred going "over the range" in a "complete edition," to being hashed in the terrible jaws of the grizzly.

By casting his eyes down the path, he had now an unobstructed view of the trail between himself and the pine motto which concealed the fierce brute; a vista which, in his present situation, was of more vital importance to him than any other portion of the landscape. Although the poor wretch taxed every muscle to its utmost, he made but slow progress, on account of his weak and generally demoralized condition. For an instant he paused, panting for breath, while great beads of cold agony oozed from every pore. The coast was now clear, and he saw that the path widened, opening into the chasm above, while on either side the walls were seamed and broken.

Once more he made an effort to proceed, but as he threw one hand forward upon the rocky path, a fearful cry sounded in front of him.

Jim Jams, thinking that another monster beast was coming down upon him, made a superhuman bound to his right, climbed over amid the rough rocks, tearing his hands in his terror, and then plunged into a dark ravine between two gigantic boulders, where he sunk, bleeding and senseless.

To explain the shrieks that have been mentioned we must return to Dashing Dolores and her captive, Reckless Rube, whom we last saw lying bound across her saddle in a torturing position.

The horse was overburdened and panting with exertion, but the half-crazed girl was determined that no one should rob her of her prisoner, or her revenge.

She had vowed that Reuben Reynolds, who had lured her from home, parents and friends, deceived her by marrying her when at the same time he was legally wedded to another—who had basely murdered her new-born babe in a fit of drunken fury, when she had said she would return with the infant to her father, who would avenge her wrongs—she had sworn that this man should one day die by her hand, a death of lingering torture; and now, after

years of privation, spent in the wilds, among lawless men, she at last had him in her power.

That he was condemned, doomed to a most fearful death at the hands of the one whom he had so basely wronged, the captive well knew, and the fact that he well deserved such a fate made him hopeless of being able to change her purpose.

As the dastard deeds of his wasted life passed in panoramic array before his mind's eye, he was forced to admit that he deserved any fate that Dolores could inflict, and he felt that his end was indeed at hand; but the merciless laughter of the girl he had so injured caused the very marrow in the wretch's bones to seem as ice, though his flesh was consuming with the fever caused by his wound.

"Groan on, Rube Reynolds!" said Dolores, in her exultation; "groan on! Your misery is my joy, but you know not yet what pain is. Sweet music in my ears will be your pleadings for death very soon. You will then recail my agonizing prayers; you will hear once more the feeble cries and gasps of my darling child, that you murdered before my eyes!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Rube Reynolds; my day has come at last, and your night—a long, dark one—is about to begin. I used to think that I would not care to live after I had glutted my vengeance and relieved the world of your presence; but I have met one who fascinates me—do you hear me, Rube Reynolds? I think I love him—that I love the dashing dandy from Denver, whom you have unwittingly assisted in bringing into my clouded life."

"Is that fresh torture for you? How like you the thought that I may enjoy life and love after you have gone to answer for the wrongs you have done me? But I have work to do."

Drawing her knife as she said this, Dolores slid from her saddle, cut the lariat, and drew her miserable captive to the earth, severing, as she did so, the cords that bound his ankles.

Woe begone and helpless, the tortured wretch was now urged by the ruthless female avenger up the narrow path, into which the horse of Jim Jams afterward wand red, to the chasm in the mountain side, where Dolores bound him to a small tree at the left of the entrance. His position was on the edge of the shadow caused by the moon, the towering wall of rock being at his back. Rube had thus an unobstructed view of the interior of the huge fissure, and of the path and its approaches below.

Filled with hopeless despair, anguish of mind, and suffering great agony from his inflamed wound, the miserable man bent his head to his breast, knowing it would be useless to plead for favor of any kind from his pitiless captor.

"Reuben Reynolds," said Dolores, in a strange, unnatural voice, "I leave you to your prayers, but I shall soon return. There is a fearful doom in store for you; and I have placed you where you can see me when I come to avenge myself and my child. Remember, there is no more mercy in my heart than in that of a famished grizzly bear!"

When the suffering bandit spy again looked up, Dashing Dolores was seated in her saddle, her horse standing in the path below, in a listening attitude.

As his eyes fell upon her, Rube heard the sound of distant firing; and, with a startled scream, the girl who had sworn to torture him to the death, drove spurs and disappeared an id to the pines toward the south. A slight ray of hope darted into Rube's mind, as he realized that the Wild Cats were fighting the citizens of Big Medicine City. How long he was partially forgetful of his sufferings, he knew not; but at length he was aroused by a scratching sound that chilled him to the bone, and turning quickly toward the interior of the chasm, his heart sprang to his throat, his hair stood on end, and he trembled with horrible dread, for not twenty paces away stood a monstrous grizzly bear, eyeing him with a ravenous look.

A nameless superstition almost overcame the bandit spy, as he recalled the parting words of Dolores.

Already he felt the huge claws and fangs tearing his vitals, his eyes were fixed and glassy, and he held his very breath; then as the huge beast stepped toward him, Rube shot out a piercing shriek, and fainted.

When he partially recovered his senses, not a living thing was in view, but he well remembered the terrible brute that had been so near to him; and when, soon after, he heard the slow crawling and panting of Jim Jams, who came toward him along the path hidden by the rocks, Rube felt sure that the dread beast was coming to devour him. In consequence of this, the sight of the sadly-demoralized human, with his wild eyes and tangled hair, bobbing about between the rocks in an endeavor to reach the open space, was sufficient in his weak and terrified state to cause him to give utterance to a second shriek, in which all sense left him, and the sound of which caused poor Jim Jams to vanish into the hole between the rocks.

Thus were left two senseless human beings, within ten paces of each other, in that desolate place, while just below them the monster grizzly tore and devoured the horse in the dark pine motto.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOPES AND FEARS.

THE intention of Dolores was to return to the canyon by the same "wash-out" along which she had traveled with her captive; but, as has been intimated, the sounds of conflict to the west of the point she intended to reconnoiter, changed for the time the current of her thoughts. She now recollected that, in her mad desire to capture Rube Reynolds she had left the miners at the south trail, without a word of explanation to them in regard to her intentions.

While these men had been crawling to the edge of the canyon bank to shoot down at the Wild Cats, the fact that Rube had been left behind by the bandits flashed through her mind and she instantly resolved to return, and get the miscreant in her power.

She left the horse of Diamond Dick, while she descended the steep bank at the risk of her life, to the spot where the wounded spy lay groaning in agony.

In her mad triumph at the success which had crowned her two long years of search, she forgot for the time those who had ventured their lives in her behalf; but, hearing the fight that was now going on she dashed toward the head of another "wash-out," which she knew would lead to a point near the scene of the conflict which was now in progress.

Not only was Dolores concerned in regard to the citizens, but, from the fact that she had left the valuable horse of Diamond Dick where he might be discovered and stolen by the bandits, and the possibility that Dick himself might have recovered, and joined in the search for herself and the trail of the Wild Cats, she felt that her place was with her friends.

Since the young girl had first seen the dandy from Denver dismount at Placer Palace, there had been new and strange feelings at work within her; and from the time that she had discovered him lying senseless in the street of Big Medicine City, shot down by the cowardly Cache Charley, she had felt an interest in him for which she could not account.

His confession, while in her cabin, that he was and had long been like herself, on a trail of revenge, together with his noble bearing, dashing bravery, and attractive face, had charged her first emotions of passing admiration to an infatuation which blunted somewhat even her insane desire for vengeance; although there still were moments when that mad thirst entirely ruled her.

Down the "wash-out" rode Dolores until she reached a point where she could, from the dark mouth of the gully, observe without being seen, what was transpiring in the basin.

No other tableau could have been arranged that would have maddened poor Dolores more than the one which was before her. In the clear moonlight, directly in front of her, stood Diamond Dick, a revolver in each hand; the weapons leveled at a party of Wild Cats whose rifles were bearing upon him.

But this truly terrific scene, this deadly danger which Dick was braving, wrung not the heart of Dolores with one half the anguish that was hers as the change of scene met her gaze—when the Woman in Black, daringly, her beautiful features stamped with taunting scorn, sat her sable steed, with glittering pistols leveled at the horde of outlaws, and protecting at the risk of her own life, the dashing dandy from Denver!

The voice, the pose, the form and face, all told Dolores that a woman and a most lovely one at that, was risking her life for Dick.

Drawing her bowie and pricking her horse, the young girl caused the animal to bound at frantic speed into their very midst and at the same moment the handsome black steed of Diamond Dick which she had left behind her galloped up from the east.

Detecting quickly that Dick was preparing to spring upon his horse, and also observing the bandit reinforcements coming headlong from the opposite direction, Dolores clutched the rope that was about the neck of Dick's horse, as the young man sprang upon the animal, and urged both beasts into the dark "wash-out" before the Wild Cats recovered from their amazement at the strange and unaccountable surprises and events of the moment.

On dashed Dolores through the darkness, in advance of Dick, who was silent, bewildered, and strangely affected by the wound which he had received; but no sooner had the mind of the young girl become somewhat calm and cleared from the excitement that had been born of the startling scenes and overpowering emotions of the past few hours, than she began to feel that she had made a terrible mistake in betraying, as she had to some extent done, her most sacred feelings.

Would not the young man—so she now feared—would he not look upon her recent insane proceeding, with a contempt not to be expressed in words?

In place of meriting his regard and gratitude for risking her life to save him, she felt that she had forfeited his friendship; and the poor girl loosened her hold upon the rope of Dick's horse, urging her own animal on in a faster gait. Then, as she gained some distance

ahead, she caused her steed to gallop over the clay bottom of the "wash-out" until she knew she was far beyond Diamond Dick.

Rendered doubly desperate from feelings of humiliation that the dashing stranger must henceforth despise her, all her thirst for revenge upon Rube Reynolds returned with treble strength, causing her to be as dangerous as an enraged panther, and she urged her horse up the "wash-out," filled with wonder and a nameless dread, as the unearthly shrieks of Reckless Rube sounded in her ears, followed by the scream of the terrified horse of Jim Jams, as the monster grizzly folded it in the embrace of death. Galloping toward the chasm, knowing not how to account for these strange sounds, but instinctively concluding that some new horror awaited her at the foot of the range.

As Dolores approached the chasm, her eyes were fixed upon the point where the path led to the huge cleft in the mountain side, for she could not gain a view of the place where she had tied her captive to the tree, until nearly opposite the chasm and in the path.

Suddenly she jerked her horse to its haunches, and her face changed to an ashen hue, while her form trembled like an aspen; for, straight before her arose the horrible form of a huge monster of the mountains, its enormous jaws dripping with gore.

The beast moved awkwardly down the path, then turned about and clasped something in its fore paws, which it dragged along, moving slowly backward toward a clump of pines.

A line of cacti bordered and hid the path, as well as the prey of the bear, but there was not the slightest doubt in the mind of the horrified girl as to what that prey was.

Dwelling in the wilds for so long a time, Dolores knew enough in regard to the immense strength and fierceness of a grizzly to prevent any further advance. Her one thought was of flight, but a horrid fascination caused her to use all her strength and skill to keep her frantic steed as near the dread motto as possible.

However, the brute slowly backed from view. There was a cracking of branches, a suppressed growl, and then came to the ears of Dolores a sickening sound of the crunching of bones and the tearing of flesh.

Neither human nor brute nature could stand this longer. Slackening her rein, while her horse trembled in every limb and snorted with terror, Dolores bounded back toward the "wash-out" with frantic speed.

She had told Reckless Rube that a terrible doom awaited him, but she had not dreamed of anything like this. She had been cheated of her revenge by a wild beast, but much as the victim must have suffered, she felt that it was still scarce one iota of what he had deserved.

After all her searching and waiting, when Rube Reynolds was in her power, she had been robbed of her long coveted revenge.

The mind of poor Dolores, weakened by long brooding over her great wrongs, nursing her vengeful feelings and gloating over her anticipated revenge, had not been equally balanced previous to this eventful night—this has already been intimated. And now so many strange occurrences had transpired, each stirring her passions and emotions to the core, one way and another, each following the other in bewildering quick succession, she was in danger of becoming hopelessly insane.

Now peeping cautiously up and down the bank, she emerged from the darkness, but no living thing, beast or man, was to be seen.

The same ghastly corpses lay on the basin-bed, and Dolores rode up toward them, but all at once the thought struck her that she had not met Diamond Dick—where could he have gone?

It occurred to her that possibly he had left the "wash-out" at the foot of the range, and might be wandering about among the pines, and by chance happen upon the lair of the grizzly.

The weak mind of the poor girl was certainly taxed to its utmost, and she gave a cry like that of a startled bird as she again spurred toward the "wash-out," but the knowledge gained by border life was now of great benefit to her, for she easily discerned in the mixed sand and clay at the entrance of the big gully evidence that Diamond Dick's horse had entered it and returned, the animal's hoof-prints being much larger than those of her own steed. Dolores now knew that Dick was safe, from the bear, at least.

Vaulting into her saddle again the young girl was about to inspect the different outlets of the basin, when, to her great amazement, the deathlike stillness was broken by a human voice.

"Dang my cantankerous cats, Dolores! Am thet ye-ou? Whar in thunderation am Di'mon' Dick?"

CHAPTER XX.

VEXATION OF SPIRIT.

THE gray streaks of coming morning were now shooting up to the eastward. The eyes and manner of the half-crazed girl, as she gazed upward showed that she was regaining her calmness and clearness of mind.

"Whar's Di'mon' Dick?" repeated Boulder Bill.

"How should I know?" was the petulant reply.

"Wa-al, hit 'pears ter me I see'd yer sashay off with him arter I sent his nag a-kitin', when ther fandang' war jist on ther home-stretch. Whar did yer peepers say by-by ter him last?"

"I have not seen him since I left this basin with him, for it was too dark in the "wash-out." I left him as soon as I knew he was safe from the Wild Cats. Perhaps he has gone in pursuit of the bandits, and got killed or captured."

"Wa-al, dod-blast hit, I'm surprised. I could a sworn yer was together. So yer didn't keep on a-playin' pards? Whar in thunderation yer bin?"

"Up to the range," answered Dolores.

"What in the name o' Crockett tuck yer thar?"

"My horse."

"Now, don't yer go ter be so dang'd sharp long o' Bill, Dolores. I'm a boss pard ter buckle ter, an I thinks a heap o' yer. What made yer skute from ther boys at ther south trail, an' whar did yer glide when yer lef' Dick's hoss on ther bank?"

"I went down the canyon after Reckless Rube: the man I was in hunt of—the one I chased from Big Medicine City."

"Did yer s'pose he'd stop behind by hisself jist ter 'commemorate yer?"

"He couldn't help himself, for I put a bullet through his shoulder at the time he galloped into the line of bandits. That is I shot his horse first, and then plugged him as I turned in retreat. He belongs to the Wild Cats."

"Wa-al, dang my felines! did yer git thet clost'er them?"

"Yes, and came very near being captured."

"And did yer kerral thet Rube, es yer calls him?"

"Yes, I captured him."

"Good ag'in! Wa-al, I reckon he's a bad aig. Whar mought ther no-'count cuss be now?"

Dolores shuddered, and was silent.

"Never mind, leetle gal," said Bill; "yer needn't 'splain things. Hit hain't none o' my biz nohow. But I hez a heap on my han's, an' I'd like yer help afore I plays my nex' in this lively game."

From the moment that Border Bill had been recognized by Dolores, the latter had settled into a listless attitude, leaning against the saddle of her horse; but judging from Bill's last words that he had something of importance to communicate, she rode on past the scene of the recent fight.

"Take yer nag roun' ther bend, leetle gal, an' tie him ter a snag; then glide this-a-ways."

In less than five minutes Dolores joined Bill, who, with a gesture of caution, bade her follow him, and both proceeded along for about a pistol-shot towards the range, the dwarf pines growing thicker as they advanced.

At the distance mentioned the miner stopped, and seated himself, inviting Dolores to follow suit.

"Take a squat down, an' rest. This hyer hez bin a tough ole night fer us all, an' I'd 'a' tuck my afferdavy ther warn't a female woman in New Mex' thet could a stud half what yer hez, an' not wilted inter her stockin's. Did yer hear a rifle-shot a while ago? Hit war then thet I see'd yer. I looked out kase I wanted ter see what war up."

"No, I heard nothing," said the girl, as she seated herself. "Who do you suppose fired it? Could it have been Diamond Dick, do you suppose?"

"Why does yer ax thet?" inquired Bill quickly.

"Because if he had occasion to shoot, he'd do it."

"Dang'd ef yer hesn't gut him b'iled down fine! Thet air 'bout how I put it. Yer hesn't see'd Big Med'sun while ye hes bin skutin' roun', hes yer?"

"No, but I hope he has come up with Dick. You don't think the Wild Cats have taken him, do you?"

"Nary a time. Thet air ef ther red air with Dick; but I'd like mighty well ter crawl roun' on a lone scout ter 'vestergate things. Ther Wild Cats would 'a' tuck ther young sport in out o' ther wet ef hit hadn't bin fer thet black velvet shemalé."

Dolores sprang at once to her feet.

"Do you know who that woman was, Bill?"

"Sartin sure. Thet war Captain Halfhand's right bower. Ther Wild Cats calls her the Queen, an' she 'pears ter be ther boss o' ther hull fit-out. I'm dead sure she air at ther present time. But squat yerself, leetle gal, an' don't git excited."

"I will calm myself long enough," said Dolores, "to tell you why I hold such a deadly enmity toward Reckless Rube, for I feel that something dreadful is to happen to me before long, and I wish everybody to know why I have acted so wild and strange, as also the reason that I have been wandering among the plains and mountains, far from those of my own sex."

The young girl then related in detail the sad events of her life; without, however, revealing

the last terrible scene which she had witnessed in the path which led to the huge chasm where she had confined her captive.

Boulder Bill listened with wonder, and ground his teeth in a rage, as the perfidy of Rube Reynolds was made known to him.

"Dolores," he said, in a voice of deep sympathy, "I know'd yer hed a heap o' trouble, but I'll sw'ar I didn't s'pose thar war a human bad enough ter squeeze ther life outen his own helpless baby. Dang my cats! Ef I ever freezes my peepers onter thet Rube ef I don't make kiote hash outen him, though I knows in my own mind hit 'longs ter ye-ou ter send him 'over ther range' et a slow trot. My rifle would go off et a half-cock ef I gut nigh ther cuss. But I'll change ther subject. I've gut Captain Halfhand tied ter a tree in ther motte yunder, an' I wants yer to take a lay-down thar, an' siester ther time away, until I 'roves back ag'in."

Dolores gazed at Bill in surprise and incredulity.

"I'm a-givin' yer ther solid truth, leetle gal. Come an' take a squint et ther cuss. He mought 'a' bin a han'some man when he war fixed up in States togs, but he's a or'nary-lookin' spes'mun of a human 'bout now. I war 'tendin' ter pump him an' skeer him into spittin' out whar his hole in ther rocks war, but he hain't gut no more sense nor a b'iled owl. He's off his kerbase, an' c'u'dn't tell ther differ atween a camel an' a kiote. Ef we 'uns fights ther Wild Cats now, we is buckin' ag'in' a shemalé capitan. Least-ways she wars ther breeches, es yer see'd ter-nite."

While speaking, Boulder Bill led the way to the motte, Dolores following him, with great curiosity.

The two stepped within the pines just as the sun began to kiss the tops of the peaks along the range above them, and there was sufficient light to reveal to Dolores the form and features of the bandit chief, although she was under the necessity of taking Bill's word as to the identity of the man, as his most intimate friend would not have recognized him.

Captain Halfhand was secured to a tree, in a sitting posture, his back being against the trunk of the same. His head was bent forward, his chin resting upon his breast, and he was apparently insensible to his surroundings. His hair was tangled, his clothes torn, and he was smeared with dirt and blood from head to foot.

"Ther cuss orter hev his fortygraph tuck 'bout now," said Bill, stroking his whiskers in evident satisfaction. "But, Dolores, I'm anxious 'bout Big Med' an' Di'mon' Dick. I'll skute back 'fore long. Mister Halfhand won't trouble yer, an' yer kin snatch a few winks o' sleep, fer yer needs hit bad. I ain't 'tall afear'd yer'll fall in love with ther cuss an' low him ter levant."

Bill stalked from the motte, and Dolores threw herself on the sward; and then, with her weary head resting upon her arm, she fixed her eyes in a steady stare upon the bandit chief.

CHAPTER XXI.

"HELL HATH NO FURY LIKE A WOMAN SCORNED."

WHEN the report of Big Medicine's rifle burst on the air, the bandit fell dead by the side of Diamond Dick; and as the war-whoop of the Kioway sounded from the high bank, our hero found himself almost instantly blindfolded and bound upon a horse, which, from the previous order of the Bandit Queen, he supposed must be his own noble black. The next moment, with the sounds of rattling hoofs and deep curses filling his ears, Dick realized that he was being borne away at headlong speed amid the horde of Wild Cats. Although he felt that he was in a position from which there seemed to be no chance of release, the young man was by no means hopeless.

He knew that the faithful Indian would trail the bandits to their lair, and he felt positive also that Boulder Bill was near at hand, or else that he had returned for Square Sim and the citizens, who would advance up the canyon en masse when they knew that there was a prospect of breaking up the band that had so long infested the northern half of New Mexico. But there were two things which puzzled him greatly. One was the absence of Captain Halfhand; and the other, that Lucile had protected him from the outlaws. He was very certain that those by whom he was surrounded would delight in tearing him limb from limb, in revenge for the death and disaster he had wrought among their band, and that they were only prevented or delayed by the—to him—unaccountable conduct of the woman whom he so much detested.

From all that he had observed, he knew that Lucile Luzerne was one who was desperate and entirely devoid of fear; that border life had changed her from a deep, designing adventuress who would commit secret crime to carry out her plans, to a bold, daring she-devil who would shoot down a man or a beast without feeling pity for one more than the other.

The deep interest that she had taken in him, was an enigma; still he saw no other way in which he could extricate himself from his

present predicament than by taking advantage of it.

Dick knew that they had not proceeded more than a mile from the place where he had been blindfolded, when the horses were brought to a walk over rocky ground. He detected, also, from the sound of the hoofs, that the bandits were riding singly, and, therefore, that they must be in a narrow passage. In a little time, however, they began to walk over soft sward, and soon after halted, when our hero was cut loose from the saddle.

He knew, by the change of air and from the fact that he was being led over stone floors, that he was in a cavern. Soon a ponderous door was opened and the bonds that secured his hands behind being cut, he was roughly pushed forward and the door closed with a loud clang. He heard the turning of the key and the snap of the bolt, and with an effort he tore the scarf from his eyes.

When he had done so, however, he stood for the moment unable to see, being blinded by the brilliant light of the apartment. Becoming more accustomed to the glare, Dick found that he was in an extensive cave-chamber, some sixty feet in length, and forty wide, with a high arched roof.

A number of large wax candles were burning in tin sconces around the walls, and others stood upon a large table, the lights being reflected in twice ten thousand scales of mica that flocked the rock on every side.

To his left was a large wooden platform, carpeted with handsome robes; and a huge lounge, upon which was a pillow and several panther-skins, with several chairs, made up the furniture of the immense apartment. Upon the table was a bountiful supply of eatables, besides several bottles and glasses, indicating that the hungry and thirsty need not go further to satisfy themselves.

Deciding at once to make the best of everything, Dick helped himself freely, and then, finding that the inviting couch could no longer be resisted, he rolled himself in a panther-skin, lay down, and soon fell into a deep sleep.

Scarcely an hour had passed, when the key grated in the lock and the Woman in Black stepped into the chamber. Darting a quick glance on each side of the room, her face became drawn in a fiendish scowl of mingled surprise and anger. She evidently thought that her orders had been disobeyed; that her followers, instead of confining the captive, had secretly murdered him, in revenge for the death of their comrades.

Closing and locking the door, Lucile advanced over the stone floor with quick, nervous pace, but with a tread as soft as that of a creeping assassin. Her eyes were filled with fire and fury, that boded ill to those who had disobeyed her commands; but glancing toward the pile of robes, her whole manner changed, the expression of her face softened, the fierce light in her eyes died out, and she stepped lightly upon the edge of the platform, her hands clasped and a look of the most intense relief stamped upon her strangely fascinating countenance.

Kneeling upon one knee and gazing into the face of the sleeper, the whole form of the woman trembled. Then she arose quickly, clasped her hands over her eyes for an instant, and then hastened beyond the table into the middle of the apartment, where she walked back and forth, her face showing the marks of conflicting passions, and her arms at times tossed wildly in the air, as if warding off some shapes of evil.

At last she gave vent to her feelings in words—strangely spoken words, that sounded unnatural in such a place. Deep regret and remorse, desperate defiance and murderous madness, were shown alternately in every tone and expression. The voice, which at times had a sound that was clear and silvery, at others came in hoarse and gasping utterances like the last words of the dying.

"Despair, degradation and death!" she cried out, as she paced the rocky floor like a caged tigress. "He"—pointing to the lounge—"has sworn to make me suffer all this, and I have often laughed, as I repeated the words since that letter of his to the Mayor of Taos fell into my hands in so strange a manner. Until tonight, those words of his have had no effect upon me, except to excite mirth. The threats of a Quixotic youth who, having read some romantic tale, fancies he has cause, swears revenge upon those who he thinks have injured him or his! 'Tis but a fancy, that of his, for there was no proof of what he alleges but Holbrook's desertion of his family. Despair, degradation and death! Never until to-night did I know the real meaning of such words. I begin to feel already to the depths the first two. It was despair, when I opened that door, and not perceiving him, fancied that I had been disobeyed and that they had murdered him. Degradation! Ye gods! Did any human ever feel more degraded than I when I witnessed this youth's undaunted bravery, and felt that I had sold myself to that thing, that craven George Holbrook? I never cared for the fool, but I needed money, and he was the first fish that came into my net. Oh, how I have loathed and

detested him! Never, until this night, have I known what love really is; and now my whole being is wrapped up in this mere boy, who has brought me to feel degradation and despair. But will he bring me to the last? Is he destined to carry out his oath, and be my death?"

"There seem to be mysterious influences at work, and all pointing to favor this George McClellan. Puebla Pete tells strange stories—strange, but I believe, true. Cache Charley, a fair marksman, attempts his death, and loses his own life. Reckless Rube runs the gantlet in Big Medicine City, only to be shot by a woman, after he has joined Halfhand and is skulking behind his comrades. Pete says this girl is known as Dashing Dolores.

"One thing I know: if this Dolores falls into my power, I'll torture her. I'll make her beg for a drop of water and a crumb of bread. Only the fiends know how I hate her for coming between me and young McClellan to night. But for her interference, I would have brought him through without a scratch, and won his gratitude and friendship, which would soon have been followed by love. All, everything, everybody has favored him toward bringing about his work of vengeance. But his luck has turned, and he is now in my power. His race is run. He must be mine, or he dies! But he shall not die—he shall be mine! He must be mine!"

"Why did I ever degrade myself with that pitiful cur, Holbrook? He would never have been in command of the Wild Cats but for me. Now I rule supreme. But how is it? I never before dreamed that I had a conscience. But now the pale, patient face of Katharine Holbrook, and the innocent eyes of her little ones, seem to haunt me.

"Back, I say! Back! 'Twas not I that murdered you. I am not guilty. I did not even love your husband, you poor, innocent Katharine. Take him from you, indeed! Not I. He dared to love me, the weak villain. He had the courage even to leave his family and fly with me. He left for Canada, to be gone two weeks, and in that little space of time his wife became insane, his children died, and a warrant was made out for his arrest on a charge of forgery. Yes; the children were ill when Holbrook went away. They died one by one, and he would have been mobbed had he returned.

"People said it was all a put-up job, that visit to Canada—a blind—and so it was. Ha! ha! It was I who played that game. He would never have been equal to it by himself. Money I wanted, and I was bound to accomplish my purpose, even were I to be hanged for it. To the West then it was. We had gold in plenty, and I was free! Yes! I, Lucile Luzerne, am not to be balked in my purposes. I win, or die!"

During the latter part of this soliloquy of the Queen of the Wild Cats, she stood perfectly still, and with her eyes fixed on a gloomy corner of the immense room, as if some scenes from her past life were there pictured before her. Turning about she glanced toward the couch. Then, seeing that her words had not aroused the sleeper, she continued:

"I could almost believe that I am going mad! I never before felt so strangely. What has come over me? I am full of horrible fancies tonight; flitting visions from the past float before me, and I have not the power to drive them away. Can it be that this youth's oath is to be carried out? Am I to taste the bitterness of that last word of his—*death*? Ha! ha! I am ashamed of you, Lucile Luzerne. You are better fitted for a gentle shepherdess than for a bandit queen. I must keep the run of the cards to the last. I'll prove to George McClellan, if he does not surrender his heart and soul to me, that 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.'"

Then, walking up to the table with a firm step, the Woman in Black poured out a goblet of wine with a hand that still trembled in spite of her effort at self-control, and drank it, never withdrawing for a moment her gaze from the panther-skins that hid from view the sleeping form of Diamond Dick.

CHAPTER XXII. ONE DROP OF WATER.

FOR at least ten minutes after Boulder Bill had left the motte, Dolores reclined motionless upon the ground, her eyes fixed upon the form of the bandit chief, who seemed to be returning to consciousness. But she was soon brought to her feet by an unearthly shriek, in which were blended agony and deathly terror. She trembled in every limb, while her eyes stared in horror toward the range, at the point from whence the dismal sounds proceeded.

Dolores had heard the same fearful cry before, it having been given, as she supposed, by Reckless Rube as the huge grizzly attacked him, and once again, probably when his life was being crushed out.

What could it mean?

Surely the doomed wretch had been devoured by the mountain monster long ere this. But had she really heard it? All was still now—silent as the grave. Could it be the lost spirit of the man whom she had left to such a terrible fate that was now haunting her with its cry of hopeless despair?

These thoughts now pressed themselves upon the disordered brain of the poor girl. She pressed her palms to her throbbing temples, and began to realize that there could be no peace of mind for her until she had visited the chasm. Rushing frantically from the pines to the "wash-out," she mounted her horse, and urged him at full speed toward the range, without a thought in regard to the bandit chief.

As Dolores neared the chasm, and the motte hid it from her view, she with difficulty forced her horse onward, her eyes, meanwhile, being fixed upon the green shades into which the grizzly had disappeared.

Reaching at length the trail on the east side of the motte, she glanced upward toward the huge cleft in the mountain side; but, at the same moment, she jerked her horse to his haunches, and uttered a shrill cry of amazement and horror.

There was Reuben Reynolds, or his ghost, still bound to the tree as she had left him!

Had her life depended upon it, Dolores could not have told whether the shriek she had heard was real or imaginary; neither could she tell whether the sight which now met her gaze was a reality, or some trick of her frenzied brain. All doubt, however, was soon laid at rest; for the head of the sufferer was upraised from his breast, his eyes opened, and he stared wildly at the poor girl whom he had wronged.

A hoarse, pleading cry burst from his parched lips.

"Water! Water!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

The laugh of Dolores was full of insane joy.

"Ha! ha! ha! I thought you were in Hades by this time, Rube Reynolds. I feared that the bear had sent you there before your time, and had thus stolen my revenge. What you suffer now is nothing to what is in store for you. Many a time in the dreary past have I pondered in what way I could most torture you when I got you in my power. You have now suggested your own fate. You shall die of thirst and hunger. Your lips shall parch and crack. Your tongue shall blacken and swell until you choke. Your eyes shall be like coals of fire, and your brain echo with the crackling and hissing of flames, before your vile spirit leaves its worldly tenement, in which shape it has dishonored and degraded the very name of man!"

A shriek of intense anguish, physical and mental, answered the terrible sentence which the girl pronounced.

Too well did Reckless Rube know that his dastard deeds had driven all mercy, all pity, from the nature of the once trusting, loving girl; that the torture he had inflicted upon her in her helpless despair, had crazed her, and filled her with a longing desire for revenge, which nothing less than what now awaited him could satisfy.

He had been deaf to her pleadings when she had prayed him to spare her innocent infant; and he was now forced to believe that all her dreadful threats would be carried out to the letter. His present almost unendurable agonies were multiplied by the thoughts of those which were to come; and when Dolores urged her horse up the difficult path, the spirit of her Indian ancestors ruling her whole nature, he gave another cry of hopeless terror, and again sunk into a merciful state of insensibility.

Riding up to her captive, the girl proceeded to cut the thongs which bound him, and then dragged him over the rock to its edge. Forcing her steed against the boulder, and with a strength born of intense passion and excitement, she drew the senseless man across the saddle in front of her, where he hung limp, his limbs and head on either side. Having thus again secured her prisoner, with an exultant cry she urged her steed down the path and into the head of the "wash-out," down which she went, crossing the basin, and out from it on the southern side to the open prairie, which stretched south and west to the far-off horizon.

On, over the prairie, staggered the weary, overburdened steed, with its strange load, the hot sun now darting down upon them, and Dolores shouting in her madness, and laughing and crying alternately.

A long ribbon of scraggy pines and cedars lined the south side of the canyon and screened the plain from the view of any who might be lurking among the rocks at the foot of the range.

The air was hazy and smoky, as if a prairie fire was raging, and the line of verdure was of a dull bluish hue. Here and there, the poor fagged animal wandered aimlessly, without guidance, until at length, when some two miles from the canyon, an idea seemed suddenly to change the thoughts of Dolores, and she halted and sprang to the earth.

Grasping Reckless Rube by the collar of his jaqueta, she allowed him to slide down upon the sward with a shock that caused him to utter a moan of agony, which she answered with a peal of laughter.

Detaching a canteen from her saddle, Dolores drank some of its contents, and then began pouring the water into the mouth of her horse.

Her wretched captive opened his eyes at this moment, eyes which now protruded from their

sockets, and shone glassily, and his features being drawn with an expression of such intense longing, that the sight of him would have melted a heart of stone. As the girl saw his agonized face, she held the canteen toward him, allowing a tiny stream of the water to flow down and soak into the earth. She then gazed gloatingly into his eyes, and without the slightest show of pity in her own.

Again she held the canteen to her lips, and drank slowly, with an air of satisfaction the most tantalizing. Taking the iron picket-pin from the end of her lariat, and securing the legs of her captive, she proceeded to loosen the earth in a small circle near the position of Rube, who now lay with his eyes fixed in piteous pleading upon her.

"I am digging a grave, Rube Reynolds," she said, in a strange whisper, in the ear of the poor wretch, which caused his flesh to creep and his hair to writhe. "I am digging your grave. I could bury you alive, but I'll not be so cruel to you as you were to poor baby. You would smother to death, and that would be a very painful end. Oh! no, I do not want you to die in the same way as my baby, or I would have you hung by Square Sim; but you must not die as my little darling did. I would not even bury you as baby was buried, but that I know the wolves will dig you up, and that your bones will bleach on the hot plain."

"I love the wolves, for they never kill their own young, as you did, and I believe they would not eat you if they knew what you had done. How hot it is! If there is any way I could make sure of your not escaping me, I would force you to dig your own grave!"

As Dolores spoke she stopped her work, to look at him. The miserable being strove to speak, showing that he realized there might be a way of escape from his terrible doom, if he were thus allowed the use of his arms; but a second glance at her changed countenance, followed by her mocking laugh, once more plunged him into the lowest depths.

"Ha! ha! ha! I cannot allow you to dig, Rube Reynolds. That would never do. You little thought that the poor helpless wreck you left behind in San Antonio would hunt you to the death—that she would travel thousands of miles, and suffer privations that strong men break down and die under, to avenge her wrongs! But I shall bury you, and perhaps marry Diamond Dick. Then I shall enjoy myself, as I would have done through life had you never crossed my trail. I'll come and dance on your grave sometimes—but, I forget: you will not be here, for the wolves, you know, will attend to that!"

The suffering of Reckless Rube from the thirst, which caused his senses of sight and hearing to be doubly acute, were beyond description.

While Dolores had been speaking, she had excavated a deep hole some five feet from the surface, and about a foot and a-half in diameter.

She then bound the limbs of Rube more securely, and slid him feet first into it. As he now stood erect, his head and shoulders were just above the surface. Filling in the loose earth around him, and stamping it firmly about his body, the crazed girl soon left little more than the poor wretch's head in view.

At this moment, her attention was caught by a rumbling sound on the plain; and, looking toward the north-west, she saw a score of war-painted Apaches coming like the wind, their feathers and hair flaunting, their weapons glittering, and their steeds snorting.

Still the look of exultation on the girl's face was unchanged—not a trace of fear or concern was visible.

With a rush like a tornado, the paint-daubed demons of the Llanos galloped forward, and surrounded her.

Halting suddenly, they stared in surprise at the strange scene; and when they saw the head of Reckless Rube projecting above the plain, and perceived that their appearance had no effect upon the young squaw, they gave deep, guttural grunts of amazement, each gazing at the other, and tapping their foreheads with their fingers, after which they pointed upward, signifying that the Great Spirit had laid his hand upon the squaw before them—that she was insane.

Just then Dolores, with a yell, drew her revolver, a movement that caused every Apache to start back, for it would, according to their traditions and belief, bring ruin and death upon them, if they should harm her in any way.

However, the girl was too quick for the Indians; for her pistol belched forth fire and lead, and a pony of one of the Apaches fell dead, the rider bounding up instantly behind one of his fellow-braves, and all dashing away toward the south at headlong speed, casting back glances of terror, as the wild laughter of Dashing Dolores filled the air.

"Ha! ha! Rube Reynolds, you are in luck. The wolves might have failed to visit you to-night, but for the horse those Apaches have kindly brought. You would have been lonesome, I know; but now you are sure of company—company that will howl your requiem, while the stars look down and smile in triumph. Baby is

in one of the stars that you will see to-night. It is the brightest one among them, and he will laugh with glee when he sees the wolves entertaining you. Here, I'll give you a drink, for I do not want you to die too soon!"

Dolores then poured the remaining water from the canteen down the throat and over the head of the doomed wretch, and then sprang into the saddle.

"Rube Reynolds, adios! I go to see after Diamond Dick, but I'll call to-night and see how the wolves and you enjoy each other's company. They will not disappoint you—never fear—for the dead horse will draw them here. Reckless Rube, adios!"

With a ringing peal of insane laughter, Dolores, waving her sombrero in adieu, galloped toward the range, the wild, imploring screams of Rube, who had, through the draught of water, recovered his voice, sounding in her ears, and causing her to turn in her saddle and shriek back in mockery.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NOT ONE MAN LEFT.

THE wine she had drunk caused the Queen of the Wild Cats to brighten, her cheeks flushed, and for a moment she stood undecided whether to end her torturing suspense, and yet not daring to awaken the sleeper, lest her hopes should at once be dashed to the earth. Such an ending to the interview that awaited her seemed only too probable; this was evident in her mind, for a shudder occasionally shook her frame.

She stepped toward the door, as if fearful of awaking the sleeper; but, at this instant, the hands of Diamond Dick were raised upward, as if to ward off some danger, and from his lips came the words in clear tones, although he still slept:

"Stand aside! He dies by my hand!"

"He is fighting in his dreams," said the bandit Queen. "Will he say anything of me?"

So saying, she approached and knelt by the lounge. Fearing to disturb him, she waited for some time in silence. At last the lips of the young man parted, his face expressing great anxiety, but only a single word broke the deep stillness. It was spoken as if the speaker wished the presence, but knew not the location, of the one whom he called:

"Dolores!"

No sooner did this hated name strike her listening ears than Lucile Luzerne's face became contorted with murderous passion. Her eyes blazed with jealous fury, and her hand unconsciously clutched at Diamond Dick. He sprang to his feet on the platform, at the same time thrusting both hands around his belt for his revolvers.

This sudden and unexpected movement threw Lucile forward upon the buffalo-ropes, where she lay, striving to control her fierce passion.

Without fully comprehending where he was, the young man, seeing that he had overturned some one, stooped on the impulse of the moment, and lifted her to her feet. She was trembling, and feigning to sob.

Hatred and the most intense abhorrence took full possession of our hero, as he cried out:

"What means this intrusion, murderess? You have me in your power. If my time has come, I am ready, but otherwise come not near me. You are weeping, I see! Does that mean that you are beginning to repent of your past crimes? If so, ask your God to pardon you, and avaunt! Quit my sight! Get thee to a nunnery!"

The outlaw Queen did not allow her face to be seen until Dick had ceased speaking. Then she threw aside her long hair, and stood before him in all her ravishing beauty. It was only for a moment. With a bitter cry she sunk at his feet, exclaiming:

"George McClellan! I, who never knelt or sued to mortal man or woman—I, Lucile Luzerne, Queen of the Wild Cats, kneel to you! You say you are in my power. It is I who am in your power. 'Tis I whose time to die has come, and you are my executioner. I came hither to watch your slumbers, not to disturb you; but in your sleep you fought your battles over again, and awoke—"

"And I say to you, Lucile Luzerne," said Dick, in amazement and contempt, "that you have gone mad! Do you suppose it possible that I could look upon a poisoner of the innocent with other feelings than those of horror and loathing? Ay, even though she is a woman, and a very Cleopatra in beauty! What do you take me to be? I have sworn to avenge my murdered aunt and her children—the woman whose place you usurped, whose husband you lured from home and honor to vice and crime—I have sworn that he shall die, and that you shall curse the day that you met him! And you can judge, perhaps, whether I am one who will keep his oath. I am a prisoner, it is true, but I fear no man, and I feel that a God of justice will spare my life, and nerve my arm. George Holbrook, who forged my father's name, and then deserted his family to fly with you, even when he knew that they had already been doomed to death—he, I swear, shall die! You are a woman, and therefore safe from violence at my hands, but your suffering shall be none

the less severe. Some way will be open to this end. I feel, even now, that your race is run, and that the Fates will hurl disaster and destruction along your path!"

While he spoke, Lucile bowed her head and veiled her features; being nearly thrown into spasms of fury. But she was determined to win him over, if possible, and she calmed herself.

"George," she said; "if I were what you seem honestly to think I am, I could not blame you for your words, or your vow. But you wrong me—you are terribly mistaken! I am far from being the woman you deem me. Had it not been for the wretch Holbrook, whom I never enticed from his home, I would not now be a member of a bandit band. I have never done personal injury to any one, except in self-defense. Sooner than have given poison to Katharine Holbrook and her little ones, as you have charged me, I would have swallowed it myself. Holbrook may indeed be guilty, if they did not die from natural causes. I believe him to be capable of it. I detest him more than tongue can express. To prove my words, if he be alive, I will deliver him into your hands, to do with as you will. Circumstances have forced me into this lawless life; but I would change it all, gladly, and live on a crust of bread with you. Here, I rule supreme. I have countless gold, all of which is yours if you say so."

"You can be the chief of the band, if you choose, and I your willing slave; or we can fly, with a princely fortune, to some land where we shall not be known. Do not say that you hate me—I am yours, George McClellan, if you will take me, body and soul."

Diamond Dick felt compelled to admit, as he looked upon the woman before him, that it seemed absurd to connect such a beautiful being with the crimes which he had believed her to have committed. As he listened to her appeal, he felt that very probably Holbrook had indeed seduced Lucile from the path of virtue; although, had he not been within the influence of her voice and presence, he would have struck to the earth any man who reasoned as he now did.

Still, he was suspicious; the glamour of her voice and beauty had cast a spell over him, and yet he was not convinced in his own mind in regard to her innocence. For his own safety, however, and to carry out his plan of vengeance, he saw that he must take advantage of the infatuation Lucile felt for him.

Much as Dick detested dissimulation, he deemed it excusable in the present emergency. He resolved, therefore, to take a neutral position.

As the bandit Queen ceased speaking, he raised her to her feet and placed her on the lounge.

"Lucile Luzerne!" he said; "God and yourself know whether you speak the truth or not in regard to what I believe to have been crimes. It does not seem possible that my aunt and her three children could have died as they all did, within three weeks, from natural causes. I am very willing, however, to think that you may have been wronged by the suspicions against you. Do not speak of my turning bandit. You ought to know that I would die before I would link my fate with such men as form this outlaw band. But do as you suggest. Deliver into my power George Holbrook, alias Captain Halfhand, and from him I will extort the truth!"

Diamond Dick paced the platform impatiently during these remarks, and the Queen of the Wild Cats watched his every movement, and weighed well each word, feeling both relief and triumph; for, she reasoned, if George McClellan could change so much at one meeting, she could in time win him over, and in place of her kneeling and suing to him, the tables would be completely turned.

She was cunning enough not to spoil the effect of what she had said, by using more words on the subject; and, rising to her feet, she crossed the apartment toward the door, saying:

"I shall keep my word. You shall have Captain Halfhand in your power; and, as to what I have proposed to your consideration, think the matter over. I regret to hold you for the present a prisoner, but your life would be taken instantly should any of the band get an opportunity to kill you, as they are all furious against you."

Without awaiting a reply, Lucile gave a gesture of parting, turned the key, and lifted the ponderous latch; but at this instant, the barrier before her was pushed quickly, and with great force inward.

The bandit Queen was thrown prostrate, and half a dozen of her followers rushed over her, with weapons presented, their vengeful curses filling the chamber, as they rushed toward Diamond Dick, firing as they approached.

Comprehending at once that the outlaws had rebelled, and that his life was in great peril, our hero sprang to the side of the table, and grasping a number of heavy quart bottles, hurled them, one after the other, with terrific force and precise aim, into the massed bandits, who fell before the shower of glass, as if a volley of musketry had been discharged into their midst.

Lucile Luzerne, springing from the floor to a

standing posture, weapons in hand, sent the rattling discharge of her revolvers ringing through the arched passages, followed by the heavy fall of the outlaws, one by one, upon the stone floor.

Not one was left to exult over their desperate attempt to avenge their comrades who had been slain in the canyon and the basin.

Speaking coolly and calmly, Lucile said, as she collected the arms of the slain, and thrust them into her belt:

"Make yourself at home George McClellan. I will have these carcasses removed—but, stay; it would be more prudent, I dare say, for you to throw the cadavers down a well-like cavity which you will find in that corner.

"These are the last of Halfhand's loyal followers." And, pointing to the well, the Queen of the Wild Cats left the apartment, closing and locking the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KIOWAY ON TIME.

FOR full five minutes Diamond Dick stood, with his arms folded, after Lucile left him.

He had witnessed the daring bravery of this remarkable woman, when she had defended him in the basin; but her utter disregard for her own life, and the wonderful skill she had just exhibited with her revolvers, caused him again to doubt if such a woman could be the cowardly destroyer of the helpless. The Woman in Black was indeed an enigma; and, if really as guilty as he had all along believed, was a more practiced actress than he had ever dreamed of.

Dick doubted much, however, if the bandits who were under her control, would pass lightly over the death of their partners in crime.

At the end of the time mentioned, the door again opened, and the Wild Cat Queen again appeared, somewhat agitated in voice and manner.

"I find," she said, "that my men are drinking deep, and I think it best they should not know of this shedding of blood in your defense. I shall be obliged to use great judgment in my orders to them, while they are excited by drink, or I may lose all authority, and the consequences might be serious.

"There is a wire hanging near the right of the lounge yonder; and, should anything occur, you have only to pull it, and I will come to your assistance. May our next meeting be under more hopeful circumstances;" and, with a most fascinating smile, the beautiful woman again closed and locked the door upon him.

So strange and tragic had been the experience of the young man since his arrival in Big Medicine City, that it seemed more like a horrid dream than a reality.

Turning toward the lounge, with a feeling that he would again seek the repose he so much needed, let danger threaten as it might, he suddenly fancied that something was different in its appearance. He looked closely. All was as he had left it; yet, by some inexplicable magnetism, Dick felt positive that some living being was present—that he was no longer alone with the dead!

He had not long to wait in suspense. Slowly one end of the ponderous couch was elevated, but the skin drapery concealed the cavity from view.

Grasping a large bottle in each hand, the youth prepared to defend himself, but the next instant he replaced his novel weapons and gave a low, joyous laugh, for slowly rising from the end of the lounge was the painted and plumed head of Big Medicine. The Indian sprang upright, as he caught sight of his white friend, and held up his hand with a gesture of caution. He then stalked forward, extending it in greeting.

"My white brother lives in the rocks. His lodge was closed, but Big Medicine crawled under."

"And I am rejoiced to see you, my red friend. I heard your war-cry at the canyon, and thought you might be on the trail; but how, in the name of wonder, did you gain an entrance into the stronghold of the Wild Cats?"

"Big Medicine is not a fool. He is not blind. He knows the holes of the mountains. He has been here before the bad white men. He is not a wolf or a snake, but he can crawl in the rocks."

"And I am not slow, myself, in that line," said Dick; "so if you will lead the way, I'll follow."

At this moment the Kioway caught a view of the dead outlaws, and with a guttural "Ugh," his hand went to the hilt of his knife.

"Don't mind them, Big Medicine," said the young man. "they are dead as door-nails."

"Who kill?"

"Well, I don't know how much hand I had in it. The Queen of the Wild Cats shot them."

"Who she?"

"The Woman in Black. You saw her at the basin."

"White squaw in warrior's clothes?"

"Just so. She's chief of the whole outfit."

"Big Medicine know. She heap brave squaw. Why white squaw kill her own warriors?"

"Because they came in to kill me."

"She heap big devil. She got forked tongue."

"Well, my own opinion of her was not a very exalted one, but I've changed it some. I came many miles to kill Captain Halfhand. He left his wife and children to go with this woman. I did believe she gave them bad medicine, but since I have seen how brave she is, I think I have been wrong."

"My white brother must not be like little boy. He too quick. If he ride slow, bad whites no lasso him."

"You are right, Big Medicine, I know I got myself into this scrape very foolishly, but it seems to me I had better get out of here as fast as I got in. The white squaw told me to throw these carcasses into that hole over there, but if we are going to crawl out, it is not worth while."

"Do as bad squaw say," said the Kioway.

"Come, throw down fast. Got no time for big talk."

At a loss as to the Indian's intentions, but knowing that he must rely upon his red friend's judgment, Dick proceeded to assist him in the work.

As the last of the blood-stained bodies was removed from the sight of man forever, Big Medicine whirled about and asked:

"Will my white brother play with rattlesnake?"

"That is a singular question, my friend. I think there must be a hidden meaning in it. I must say, however, that I do not. Why do you ask?"

"Black cloth squaw, she rattlesnake. Sometime she bite Diamond Dick. She bite heap white people."

"How do you know this?" asked the young man.

"Big Medicine under bed. Hear squaw talk heap when Dick sleep. Say she kill Chief Halfhand wife. Kill Halfhand papposes. Say she kill Diamond Dick if he no stay and be chief of Wild Cats."

"Did you hear her say all of that while I was asleep?" demanded our hero.

"Hear all that talk. Hear talk when she wake Dick up. Make Dick heap big fool. Come, Big Medicine tongue not forked. Show black cloth squaw in rocks when she alone. Mebbe so she talk more. She heap bad. Dick keep still."

"Lead on. I'll be silent. Is Halfhand dead?"

"No. Big Medicine only shoot horse. Know Diamond Dick want scalp, so no kill."

"Where is he?"

"Mebbe so in cave. Mebbe so in canyon."

"Good! I'll have his life yet. Lead on!"

Taking a candle from the table, the Kioway, followed by Dick, crawled under the lounge, removed a stick that upheld it, and then lowered the heavy piece of furniture to its former position.

This done, Big Medicine crept a short distance and then stood erect, and Dick, to his surprise, found that the back of the lounge concealed a cavity in the wall, which opened into a winding passage. Following this for some distance the Indian left the candle, and making a gesture of caution, grasped the hand of Dick, and led him around the curve in the passage.

Here they halted, for a ray of light fell directly in front of them from a small hole in the rock, and they heard the sound of a human voice.

The Kiowa gave a low hiss by way of caution.

Dick placed his eye to the hole, and was filled with astonishment at the sight before him.

It was an apartment furnished with great taste and elegance, when the fact was taken into consideration that the cave was so far from the haunts of men; but this held his attention but an instant, for Lucile Luzerne, the bandit queen, was pacing back and forth, her eyes blazing, and her clinched fist beating the air.

She had evidently but just returned to her room, after striving to keep her followers from too deep indulgence, and making some excuse for the absence of those who had been killed.

Filled with madness as she recalled the words of Diamond Dick, and the manner in which she had humiliated herself to him, notwithstanding the fact that he was in her power at the time, she burst out into a perfect torrent of words that at once showed her real character.

"Curse him! Yes, curse him! though I love him madly! Curse the fool for scornful such a love as mine! Although I am ten times worse than his worst suspicions would make me, he has no proof of anything he alleges. I detested Katharine Holbrook for her want of spirit, but it was a black day that I conceived the thought of drugging her and her children. There was no need of the crime, for we could have easily made our escape without it. If she had driven me from her home, or shown the least spark of anger; if she had fought for her rights, as she should have done, I would have let her live. Holbrook had refused to leave his home and family, and I resolved that there should be no home for him. But no proof can be brought against me. Slow poison undermined the nerv-

ous forces in their systems, and sent Katharine to an asylum, soon after to die, but not before her children were all under the sod. So I secured him and his money."

"Hal ha! George McClellan, I have done much for mere revenge in this world. Many that have stood in my way, have mysteriously gone to their graves; but none ever dared to brave me, to insult me as you have done, regardless of my having saved your life!"

"But you shall pay dear for it. You shall yet worship me—grovel at my feet, and kiss the very earth I tread upon. I love you too madly now, to cause you one bitter thought; but the day will come when that love will die out, and yours will kindle into a flame that will consume your blood."

"I'll bide my time; win you by fair means or foul, and make you a bandit. The feeling that now controls me will turn to murderous hate, if trampled upon; and then, woe be unto you! But I must rest now, and then find Halfhand, and allow Dick to gratify his revenge. What has come over me? I'd risk my life a thousand times for him; and then torture him to death, if he should look kindly upon another woman. If I could but find that Dolores! I'd cut out her tongue, and burn out her eyes, and then starve her to death! Curses on it! I shall go mad, if George McClellan again repulses me. He shall love—he must!"

The Woman in Black sunk upon her couch, and all was still.

As the youth stood and listened to her boasting of her fearful crimes, naught but the frequent hissing of the Kioway restrained him from betraying his presence to her.

As all became silent, Big Medicine drew Dick along the passage, around the curve, and taking up his candle again, he beckoned his white friend forward.

Another passage was traversed, when the Indian again drew the attention of his companion to another aperture in the wall, from which darted an arrow of bright light. Shading the candle with his hand for a moment, he placed it behind a projection of the rock.

Wondering what new surprise awaited him, Dick peeped through the hole, and could scarce suppress a cry of horror; for the first object that met his view was Captain Halfhand!

He would not have recognized the outlaw chief, but for the huge silver clasp which fastened his belt. His clothing was in shreds, his face scratched and bleeding, and his eyes blazed like those of a half-starved beast.

He was crouched upon the floor of a small cave-chamber, and in front of him was a mass of gold coin and jewelry, which he was fast depositing in buckskin bags.

Big Medicine did not permit Dick to linger here; but, grasping the candle, he led the way back through the passage until at a safe distance, when the red-man spoke:

"Diamond Dick has seen many things. His eyes are open. He must wait here. The bad white men watch from the rocks. Big Medicine will go bring Square Sim and his braves. When dark comes, Big Medicine lead them here. Diamond Dick will be free. He will be safe."

"Must I stay here inactive?" asked Dick, angrily.

"Big Medicine has spoken. If my brother goes out when the sun shines, he lose his scalp."

"I tell you I shall go wild if I have to remain in this underground lay-out! Captain Halfhand is going to skip with his gold. The villain knows very well that his game is up."

"Big Medicine eyes sharp. He will watch. Captain Halfhand shall die. He is my white brother enemy."

"He must die a death of torture at my hands!" said Dick. "I begin to fear there is a chance of my being ruled out of the game. But go, and call out the citizens. I can take care of myself."

With a parting word of further caution, Big Medicine, handed a knife to Dick, and vanished.

Upon finding himself thus alone; the youth was at a loss what to do, or which way to go. He knew that he was in danger of getting lost in the windings of the passage for it seemed certain that the mountain was filled with caverns. He was now at the very point in the rear of the lounge, and he made up his mind to enter the apartment in which he had been confined, and procure some food and drink, to brace himself up for the hot work that he felt sure was to come.

Leaving the candle in the passage, as he would not need it, he raised the lounge, placed the stick in position, and crawled into the brilliantly lighted room.

All was as he had left it. Naught but the blood-stains on the floor reminded him of his past peril. Hastily satisfying his appetite, and swallowing a goblet of wine, Dick started to return to the passage; but, before he reached the platform, a series of wild yells sounded from beyond the door, against which some heavy substance was hurled with great force.

He darted quickly to the lounge, crawled under, and lowered it to the usual position.

He was not a moment too soon; for, as he lay outstretched beneath it he heard the door fall inward upon the rock floor, amid the furious

yells and clatter of many feet, as the bandits rushed into the chamber he had left.

Dick soon found a place from which he could get a fair view of what was going on.

Great was his relief at having escaped the vengeance of the outlaw horde who now met his gaze; for he felt sure they would have torn him in pieces had he remained.

Wild with drink, and thirsting for revenge, they having to all appearance, ascertained in some manner the fate of those who had before visited the apartment on the same errand, a score of the most brutal crime-marked ruffians that ever disgraced humanity rushed here and there in search of their intended victim; but, as a matter of course, without success, which maddened them the more.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN DEATH UNDIVIDED.

WHEN Dolores was aroused by the shriek that sounded from the range, Captain Halfhand had begun to show signs of returning consciousness. Forced on by an irresistible impulse, she left the captive whom she had been set to watch.

Perhaps it was fortunate for her that she did so; for, had she remained, she would have been in great danger. In a few minutes after she had gone, the bandit chief opened his eyes, and stared around him. His countenance soon betrayed the fact that he recalled the near past, and realized that he was no longer in command of the outlaw band. He ground his teeth in intense rage, and tore his flesh until he groaned from the pain. The perty of the woman who had been his evil genius and made him what he was, maddened him, and made him long for some mode of revenge.

Finding himself secured to a tree, he concluded that George McClellan had captured him, and knowing he would receive no mercy, he made frantic efforts to break loose.

At that moment he heard sounds approaching through the thick branches, and soon the limbs parted, and the blood-smeared head of an enormous grizzly bear protruded through the screen of leaves, its eyes glaring with sudden surprise, caused by the sight of man.

For an instant, Captain Halfhand was as one paralyzed; then, as the bear stepped forward, with a superhuman effort, he sprang erect, snapping the cords which bound him, just as he felt the hot breath of the monster upon his cheek. With a wild cry of terror, he bounded away toward the canyon, in time to escape the horrible embrace that had so nearly been his.

On he flew over the hot sands of the basin, and darted into the cool canyon, soon passing the very spot where the lasso had encircled Diamond Dick.

Panting from fear and exertion, having now made some progress, he turned and looked behind him, as if expecting to see the dreaded beast in pursuit. Away he sped, past the entrances to many branching "wash-outs" near one of which, in a clump of cacti, Big Medicine, who had lost the trail of the Wild Cats as the canyon neared the range, now crouched.

As the fleeing form of the bandit chief met the view of the Kioway, the latter uttered a grunt of satisfaction, for he felt confident that Halfhand was heading for the secret stronghold.

Although Big Medicine was well acquainted with the lay of the land, there were so many caverns, canyons and "wash-outs," and the range was so broken and irregular in the vicinity, besides being too rocky to trail easily, he had been somewhat perplexed and disheartened when he found himself without any clew to lead him on, and was therefore rejoiced when captain Halfhand acted unconsciously as a guide.

Luckily for the Kioway, the outlaw chief was forced by fatigue to proceed more slowly, and the former glided here and there after the bandit, taking advantage of every bend and break in the canyon to avoid being discovered. The extreme caution of Halfhand at length forced the Indian to conclude that he did not intend to join the band openly, but to enter the retreat by some means known only to himself. This inference proved to be a correct one; for, by the course followed, Big Medicine, by a study of the ground, knew that it had not been traversed by any body of men or beasts. For some distance he followed on, and at last saw the outlaw disappear in a clump of cedar bushes at the base of the range. Pausing for a little while, the Kioway crawled beneath these bushes, and discovered an entrance to an underground passage. Following its windings, guided by a torch, which he felt positive was held by Captain Halfhand, he traced him until he suddenly vanished, leaving but a faint glimmer of light, which proceeded from a small hole in the rock.

Reaching this point, Big Medicine peeped through and saw the bandit chief within a small cave-chamber, reached by a branching passage.

From his manner and actions the Kioway decided that this apartment was unknown to the band, and was used as a secret hiding-place by the chief. He inferred that the main cave of the Wild Cats must be near at hand, and he sat for a moment or two calculating in his mind and trying to recall from his previous knowl-

edge his exact position in the range. After some deliberation Big Medicine groped his way along the passage, making a mental map as he proceeded, and soon discovered bars of light to his left. Great was his surprise, upon creeping up to the point of illumination, to hear the voice of a woman, and, upon peeping between the cracks where the light shone, to see the Woman in Black pacing up and down in great excitement, and talking wildly to herself.

Examining his position, the Indian found that he was beneath a box-like structure that covered a break in the wall of the chamber. He listened intently to the words which fell from the lips of the bandit Queen, and, when Dick awoke, heard everything that passed between them. Big Medicine was greatly puzzled at the course of Lucile when the bandits rushed in upon Dick, but he followed along the passage and soon discovered the chamber of the Queen herself. Although the latter was not in the apartment, he knew by the style in which it was fitted up that it was hers.

From this the Kioway returned to his former post of observation, and revealed himself to Diamond Dick, as we have seen. When he returned to the hole in the wall Captain Halfhand was busy packing his valuables for removal.

Big Medicine watched until the bandit had carried the bags of gold and jewels to the open air, the Indian judging that his intention was to convey them away under cover of the coming night.

After the catastrophe of the previous night, the consciousness that an avenger was upon his trail, and the fact that he was no longer in command of the Wild Cats, were reasons sufficient for Halfhand to leave, as his preparations indicated he was about to do; but the Kioway was not prepared for what followed—indeed, he could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses. He was forced, however, to conclude that he was now gazing upon one of the most cowardly wretches that ever breathed, and he resolved, as soon as he realized the intentions of the outlaw, that the latter should suffer death at his hands before he should succeed in accomplishing more crimes."

That which chained the attention of the Indian and caused these resolves was seeing Halfhand roll from a cavity several kegs of powder, which he placed in the middle of the apartment, at the same time smashing in the heads. The devastation and death which must follow the explosion caused Big Medicine to utter several guttural grunts and to meditate a quick retreat, as he did not feel sure that the bad white man might not, in a fit of madness, fire the mine at any moment.

But the mind of the Kioway was soon relieved, for he next saw the bandit procure a glass lantern, which he ignited, and then tramped out the pine knot he had been previously carrying, in order to work with entire safety. This done, he pulled some long hollow reeds from a dark corner and filled them with powder, laying them from the kegs along the passage. Big Medicine crawled stealthily after him, displacing the reeds as he went; and, when all became silent outside, he glanced once more along the passage.

No one was in sight, and the Indian stepped out into the cedars just in time to catch a glimpse of the bandit chief as he disappeared among the rocks. Observing now that the bags of gold were lying in a pile at the entrance of the passage, the Kioway knew at once that the outlaw had gone to procure a horse; he therefore hastily threw them, one after another, into the middle of the clump of cedars, and then made his way in the direction the ex-chief had taken.

Fearing discovery, Big Medicine climbed into a tree, beneath which was a well-defined trail, and awaited developments. He had not long to wait, for the bandit soon appeared, mounted upon a powerful horse and fully equipped. Fearing that he might enter the passage and inspect the powder-train, at the risk of being killed or captured, the Kioway decided upon immediate action.

To his gratification, Captain Halfhand guided the horse directly under the tree in which he was; and, as the animal passed beneath, Big Medicine dropped astride, behind the bandit, and clasped his arms tightly around the astonished man.

The horse, with a snort of terror, whirled quickly about and bounded down the path.

Captain Halfhand struggled and endeavored to throw himself from the saddle, but he was held as in a vise. On dashed the horse, without guidance, under its struggling double load. The Kioway soon began to see that he was as much of a captive as the man he had taken. Not only this, but the latter had the advantage, for he could draw his knife and might by a side twist wound him severely. But this advantage did not occur to the outlaw. Still, the Indian was at a loss how to extricate himself from the peculiar and dangerous position. Meanwhile the horse sped onward, left the "wash-out," and galloped madly toward the south, over the open plain.

At length the bandit seemed to recover from his amazement and to comprehend his position

more fully. His plan for revenge had evidently been foiled. His gold, he believed, lay exposed at the mouth of the secret passage, but liable at any moment to discovery, and he himself was in the power of a war-painted savage. As he realized his danger, he bent forward in the saddle, forcing his captor into the same posture; and then, working his hand backward, drew his knife.

Raising himself again, he strove to thrust the blade of his weapon upward to cut the hands that were almost crushing his ribs; but the Kioway, springing to his knees, bent the head and shoulders of his captive, at the same time retaining the firm gripe that he had taken.

With a groan, Captain Halfhand dropped his knife, and Big Medicine recovered his position. But at this moment burst, as from the earth in their front, a piercing cry of agony and despair, and the terrified horse made a bound to one side. Both men fell from the saddle. The Kioway loosened his hold as he fell, to grasp the bridle, and as the outlaw rolled under its legs, the horse gave a vigorous kick which laid him senseless.

Rising to his feet, the Indian unloosed the lariat, secured the horse, and then gazed around him.

Within a few feet of them, he saw a human head projecting from the earth, the features of the same being convulsed with terrible suffering.

Instantly Big Medicine comprehended the riddle; and he walked around, giving a grunt of satisfaction as he detected the trail of Dashing Dolores, and decided that she had at least found the man for whom she had sought so long.

As the Kioway stood contemplating this hideous torture, his gaze was drawn upward at the brazen sky, where, through the hazy air, soared the red-jowled carrion-seeking birds, craning their necks, and turning their heads sideways, to gaze gloatingly down upon their expected feast. As he recalled the events of the near past, he felt that he could detect a strong resemblance between the buried man—terribly contorted though his countenance was—and the bandit that Dolores had captured in the canyon.

Watching for a time the sufferer, who appeared unconscious of his presence, the face of the Kioway suddenly lighted up with an expression of the most vengeful satisfaction.

The man thus buried alive, and whose brain, exposed as it was to the burning rays of the sun, must seem as molten lead, was one of Captain Halfhand's followers; and, if he deserved such a fate, his chief did also. No sooner did Big Medicine arrive at what he considered such a just decision, than he once proceeded to dig a hole, using his long scalping-knife to loosen the earth. He fixed upon a spot about eight feet from the frightfully convulsed head which projected above the plain; but, before he had worked five minutes, he was forced to secure Halfhand, who gave signs of returning consciousness. It was a long and tedious task to sink the hole to the depth required, but Big Medicine at last accomplished his object, and slid the bandit chief feet first into the excavation, and quickly filled it in, leaving the outlaw leader and his tool and spy facing each other in their misery—one fated to see the orbs of the other flin in the agonizing death which must rack his own last moments.

As the Kioway trampled down the earth around the neck of Captain Halfhand, who was only just regaining his senses, the former uttered an exultant guttural chant for a short time, and then sprang upon the horse, and with a wild whoop galloped toward the south trail, where he hoped to meet Square Sim and the citizens, ready for an advance up the canyon to the cave of the Wild Cats.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER TURN OF THE WHEEL.

THE arched cave-chamber, which Diamond Dick so speedily vacated, resounded with fierce and vengeful oaths, and the drink-maddened bandits fired their revolvers at the wax candles around the walls, the reports reverberating through the cavern, and causing Lucile Luzerne to rush from her apartment in the most dread apprehension, to the scene of commotion. Three or four fierce knife-fights followed, and several of the outlaws lay bleeding on the floor when the woman in black, with a revolver in each hand, rushed into the cavern.

One glance showed her that Dick was gone, and her face turned the pallor of death, while her teeth closed fiercely over her lips, bringing the blood.

As she appeared, one of the bandits, observing her, gave a yell, and then all became silent.

The conviction flashed upon Lucile that she could only control this drunken mob by instantaneous action. She felt positive that the one she so madly worshiped had followed the corpses which she had directed him to throw from human sight.

"Where is the captive?" she demanded.

Drunk as they were, most of her band realized that their Queen was murder-mad. The

greater number of them cringed beneath her threatening gaze, dreading a volley of bullets from her revolvers.

"We 'uns hain't see'd ther cuss. Comed hyer ter cut his wizen, but couldn't find him."

So said one of the outlaws, and the intonation of his voice and expression of his face carried conviction with them; in fact, he was too drunk to deny a truth, without betraying his falsehood, either by his looks or his manner of speaking.

"Trot him out, an' we'll string him up!"

"Whar's ther captain?"

"No more petticut rule!"

These yells now smote the ear of Lucile Luzerne, and the last speaker fell on the instant, with a ball through his brain.

Two others, who attempted to draw their weapons, also sunk to the floor. The Woman in Black saw that the moment of moments in her life had arrived; and, without the slightest show of fear or weakness, she acted upon it.

"Back!" she called out. "Up with your hands! The first man who halts, or lowers a hand, dies! I am Queen of the Wild Cats still, and I'll show you I can hold my own!"

With revolvers leveled, and her fingers on the triggers, she followed the cowed horde from the apartment along the passage until they came to a strong door. When they had entered, the Woman in Black followed them, and locked it.

"Now listen to me!" she said. "If there is any more disturbance, or if I find that you have disobeyed my orders in regard to the captive, I'll fire the magazine and blow you all to perdition. You know me by this time, I hope!"

A murmur of surprise and dread ran through the crowd of outlaws, now partially sobered, as they saw their Queen leave the cave and lock them within it. Securing the heavy oaken door by bars of iron, Lucile Luzerne now returned to the chamber in which Dick had been confined. Throwing some skins over the corpses of the bandits she had shot in the mutiny, she began to pace the floor with quick, nervous steps, striving to account for the mysterious disappearance of Dick.

There was no outlet that she knew of, except by the door and down the well; and she shuddered at the thought of the latter.

He might possibly, Lucile thought, have heard the approach of those who came to murder him, and standing by the door as they rushed in, have slipped out unobserved by them. As this thought occurred to her, she darted out and along the passages, calling aloud to George McClellan.

Every possible place in which a man could conceal himself, and some that were impossible, she searched, but in vain. Once more the bandit Queen fell into a violent fury. Had she known that she was now the only living occupant of the caverns—that the Wild Cats, terrified by her threats to blow them up, had hastened to a pine-sheltered opening at the base of the range, and there encamped—she would have been doubly enraged. Had she known that Diamond Dick, at the moment she started to quell the disturbance, was under the lounge; and that the bandit's question as to where Captain Halfhand was, had reminded the young man of his oath of vengeance, and that he had then glided away to explore caverns in search of the bandit chief, Lucile would have been driven to fury indeed. But she knew nothing of this; and so, for hours, she paced the apartment, unable to arrive at any reasonable conclusion as to her future movements.

All at once it flashed upon her that as a Queen of bandits, her day was over; and that she had better collect what valuables she had accumulated, secrete them, and then set out to seek George McClellan, who might possibly have escaped to the outside world.

She could not believe that he had perished. He was too young, and too brave to die. His life had been miraculously preserved so far, and she could not but believe that the same good fortune would continue to follow him.

Suddenly her eyes rested on the lounge, and she discovered that it was not placed closely against the wall as before. She went forward and looked behind it. Only a narrow space showed that the bulky piece of furniture had been disturbed. Widening the space a little by main strength, she discovered that a dark cavity was beyond. Then she felt assured that George McClellan was alive, and had escaped by this hitherto unknown passage. By taxing her strength to the uttermost, Lucile succeeded in removing the lounge sufficiently to allow her to pass into the dark opening. Then catching up a candle from the table, she crawled into the passage. Following it onward, she soon perceived a light ahead. This, however, she found, proved to proceed from her own apartment. She now recollected, that, after leaving Dick, she had repaired to her room, and there in her rage, foolishly indulged in a wild soliloquy.

Now the thought came home to her, that possibly Diamond Dick might even then have been watching her exhibition of insane rage, and heard the fatal admissions she had made. The mere possibility of such a thing having been the case, was absolutely maddening.

However, she went on to the terminus of the tunnel, and then returning, was brought to a halt by the faint glimmer of the lantern which had been left burning by Captain Halfhand, and which Big Medicine had neglected to extinguish. The light was stationary; but connecting its presence with the person for whom she was in search, Lucile called aloud in eager tones:

"George McClellan! Diamond Dick! If you are within hearing, speak to me and end my terrible suspense. I am deserted by all, but I care not, if you will be my friend!"

Her voice sounded strangely in the dreary passage, and caused her to be filled with a timorous apprehension before unknown to her.

Did the awful shadow of a coming fate fall upon her, and chill her blood? Who can say?

No answer came, either from the light ahead, or the Egyptian darkness beyond. The strength of will and desperate daring of the woman seemed to be slowly, but surely leaving her. Bracing herself to renewed action, she went on toward the lantern, but as she neared it, her foot came in contact with a long reed. Filled with surprise, Lucile lowered her candle, when a sight met her view that caused her to tremble; for beneath and around her were small piles of gunpowder, and the presence of numerous reeds proved that a train had been laid to blow up the cavern. With a half-stifled cry of horror, she sprung onward, losing all command of herself, as the thought flashed upon her that the train would be fired at the opposite end as soon as she was discovered. Quaking with dread, she rushed forward, but her foot struck against a rough projection of rock, and she fell, the candle flying from her hand. Instinctively she closed her eyes.

Then came a piercing shriek, followed by a series of blinding flashes, and a hissing, as of a thousand serpents. With loud cries of agony, Lucile Luzerne crept on hands and knees along the passage, bruising herself in her mad haste; her hair scorched from her head, and her features blistered and blackened beyond recognition!

On, on, in a frenzy of agony she went, guided by a faint glimmer of daylight that showed through the smoke, until she reached the open air. Then she rolled in agony among the cedars in the motte, burying her blistered face in the cool grass, and giving utterance to deep moans of agony, and hopeless despair.

There, amid bags of gold and jewels she writhed, until the cords that bound them became loosened, and the yellow coins for which blood had been shed, and for which she had bartered all that is womanly, and steeped her soul in untold crime, were scattered over the earth.

She caught at the wiry grass, tearing the skin and flesh of her burned hands as she did so, and hurled hundreds of the golden coins right and left among the rocks, cursing the yellow dross for which she had bartered everything that was worth possessing here and hereafter.

Such was her agony, as she comprehended that her beauty was now gone forever, that she could not reason in regard to the mystery of their treasures being in such a place. She thought of nothing, except to be able, in a measure, to mitigate her terrible sufferings, by pressing the cool grass to her scorched flesh. She knew that she could hope for no relief, for no human aid; especially now that she had become a hideous, repulsive object; and in her anguish she cursed the world, its people and herself—cursed with insane fury, regardless of the fact that she might be heard by those who would profit by her helpless condition!

It so happened that Dashing Dolores, after having disposed in her own way of Reckless Rube had galloped toward the range with the object of seeking for any sign of Diamond Dick; but human nature could no longer endure the extreme fatigue which she felt, after privation from food and rest, and from long-continued exertion and excitement. So poor Dolores was forced to grasp the horn of the saddle for support, allowing her horse to go at will; the animal following a "wash-out" to the vicinity of the secret opening to the caverns of the Wild Cats.

Arriving there, the poor girl had just forethought sufficient to secure her steed in such a manner as to allow him to feed upon the rich grass; then she sunk to the ground, and fell into a deathlike slumber which lasted until the shades of evening fell upon the earth, when she was aroused by the cries and groans of Lucile Luzerne.

Relieved by sleep although she was, Dolores was so filled with the old mad exultation, when she witnessed the fearful condition of the woman who had come between her and Diamond Dick, that her weak mind again lost its balance.

With a cry of vengeful triumph, Dolores, as she dashed among the cedars and recognized by the unscorched portions of her black velvet costume who it was that was in her power, she bound the wretched sufferer hand and foot, and then, with fearful threats dragged her out from the motte, while she looked with insane delight

upon the lashless eyes and blackened face of her captive.

In less time than it has taken to relate it, Lucile Luzerne, overcome with hopeless horror, was bound upon the saddle, and Dolores, springing up behind her, lashed the animal at full speed away from the range, and along the bed of a "wash-out," the exultant laughter and vengeful cries of the demented girl of Big Medicine City filling the ears of her horrified captive.

In and out, among branching "wash outs" in an aimless manner, rode Dashing Dolores; alternately patting the scorched and blackened head of Lucile, and whispering soft words to her, as though she fancied it was her murdered babe that was with her; and anon, with foaming lips and flashing eyes, raising her knife aloft, feigning to drive the glittering steel into the heart of her helpless prisoner—an act which would have been considered a stroke of mercy by the wretched, hopeless Woman in Black!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REUNION.

WITH his candle firmly grasped in his hand, Diamond Dick made his way to the point where Big Medicine and himself had seen, through the fissure in the wall, the form of the bandit chief, as he counted his gold. There was no light now within the chamber, and Dick, although he examined the wall for some distance, could not find the place of observation.

He decided, however, to proceed and inspect the passage; but, as he turned around a curve in the rocky tunnel, he perceived the glimmer of a lantern some distance in front. The light was stationary, but our hero was suspicious, and to avoid exposing himself, he extinguished his own candle. The lantern now threw a dim, uncertain light, but sufficient to guide him, although revealing nothing besides. When, at length, he reached it, he found himself near the entrance to the shaft, and, a moment or two after, he stood in the shade of the cedars, the cool breeze fanning his fevered brow, and he once more free to breathe the pure air of Heaven.

Looking cautiously around, his eyes lighted upon the bags of gold that had been left by Halfhand.

Not having observed the branch passage that led to the chamber in which he had seen the outlaw putting his treasure into this shape, he supposed that it must have been reached by some other route.

Believing that the man he had sworn to kill was still within some of the numerous chambers of the cavern, Dick resolved, although without fire-arms, to make his way down the canyon to the basin, and there meet the citizens; for he was positive that the latter were by this time on the march to attack the Wild Cats. On he went until he gained a narrow ravine, which was bordered on either side by pines.

Proceeding down this for a short distance, he found that he was near a large number of horses, the noise of their hoofs showing that they were just beyond the fringe of pines. Climbing up the bank, he crawled through the underbrush, and parted the branches before him, when he discovered the horses of the bandits, lariat to stakes, and guarded from the danger of a stampede by canyon and steep mountain side.

Not a human being was in sight, and as the young man gazed around the opening, he discovered, much to his joy, his own noble black steed.

Though almost positive that the animals were guarded, and that the enterprise would be a dangerous one, Dick resolved to regain his horse at any cost. Nevertheless, he feared not the result, and in a short time he had reached the stake, cut the lariat, and led the horse to the cover of the pines. As he gained the bed of the gully, he heard a series of whoops and yells, followed by a confused murmur of many voices in contention; and he concluded that the drunken bandits had been driven from the cave by their imperious Queen. If this was the case, he knew that they could be easily cut off from their stronghold, and killed or captured without great loss to the citizens; especially now that they were so demoralized and without a leader. As to Captain Halfhand, Dick felt sure that he would not again risk his life in an attempt to contend against the men of Big Medicine City.

Leading his horse down the gully, it did not take Dick long to reach the point of the recent fight, and just as he neared the spot where he had been ambushed, he was startled by the sound of a human voice from the bank above his head.

"Dog-gone all ther cats in New Mex! Hit's Di-mon' Dick, er I'm a Greaser!"

He immediately recognized Boulder Bill, and a moment after the faithful miner came bounding down the "wash-out" into the basin, crying out gleefully:

"Dick, I'll chaw my own nose off, ef I ain't jist b'ilin' over with pure solid glad. I'm dod-blasted tickled ter see yer onc't more. Where in thunderation hes yer bin?"

"I've been in the cave of the Wild Cats, Bill," was the reply. "How happens it that you are here alone?"

"Bin in thar cave?" exclaimed Bill, in the utmost astonishment. "How did yer git in?"

"Easy enough. They carried me in. But I walked out without saying good-by. Have you seen Big Medicine?"

"Nary a Big Med", since arter thet squabble, when they comed so dang'd near corralin' yer. This air ther wustest mix'd-up outfit I ever heerd tell on. Fust off, I corraled Captain Halfhand, an' chucked him a'gin a tree, an' made him fast. Nex' I diskivered Dolores, an' got her ter fasten her peepers onter ther cuss while I skuted up ther range fer find out whar Big Med' war, an' see ef I couldn't strike some sign o' ther Wild Cats. When I comed back, Halfhand an' Dolores hed both levanted, an' ther motte war chuck full o' fresh grizzly sign. Ef ther b'ar made a lunch offen 'em, hit hes done ther job up clean, fer thar ain't a rag er a button scattered 'roun' nowhar. Howsomever, Dolores skuted, in ther fust place, up the 'wash-out,' with thet cuss,

Rube. She hed ther gerloot tied ter ther saddle, an' he looked es slimsey es a sick cat-fish—hedn't no more sense nor a b'iled owl. I'm plum sartin sure he's ther cuss what Dolores hes bin layin' fer more'n a year, up an' down ther range.

"Arter a while she come on ther stompede ter find out what ye-ou hed p'inted. But ther fact air, I'm so dog-goned mix'd up that I doesn't know fer sure whether I air Bowlder Bill er some other soft-headed pilgrim. Jim Jams, Rube, Dolores, Cap' Halfhand, an' yerself, all disappeared, an' you is ther only human what hes 'roved back ag'in. An' hyer hit's nigh dark, an' ther cits hain't struck out this-a-ways yit. But whar in ther dickens air yer shooters?"

"The Wild Cats confiscated them, but I expect to get them back before another sun shines. Halfhand is in his cave, but is preparing to leave. The bandits are having a jollification—in fact, they are drunk, and now is our time to strike. Come, Bill! we must go for Square Sim and his men. This night is to end the career of the Wild Cat band."

"I hopes ter thunder hit'll turn out es yer ses, Dick," said Bill, running briskly up the "wash-out," and returning mounted upon his horse, which had been secreted on the margin of the canyon bank among the mesquites.

Reaching the plain above, they found Square Sim and some thirty miners encamped. Dick and Bill were welcomed with shouts and cheers.

"What in thunder hes yer bin layin' hyer fer, boys?" inquired the latter. "Why didn't yer levant up ther range an' help ter clean out ther cussed bag-slashers?"

"We are not fixed for such a desperate enterprise," said Square Sim. "We were forced to send back for ammunition and grub, besides we have been waiting for some of you advanced scouts to return with information in regard to the retreat of the Wild Cats and their probable strength. You two boys, with Jim Jams, Big Medicine, and Dolores all disappeared; but we supposed that at least one of you would return to guide us. Where is Dolores? Have you seen anything of Jim Jams, or the Indian?"

"We have not seen either of them," answered Dick. "I was not aware that Jim Jams, poor fellow, had gone up the canyon."

"Why," said the sheriff, "he followed close after you."

"I have not seen him since I left him here," said Dick.

"He is probably asleep in some gully," suggested Square Sim; "but now, boys, what about the Wild Cats?"

The miners listened with the most intense surprise to what Dick and Bill had to relate, especially when the former gave the details of his capture and escape.

"Then the Woman in Black has returned to this section," said Square Sim. "The last we heard of her she was on the range some fifty miles below. She is a perfect fiend, and has shot more men than any five of her gang, escaping only because she is a woman, and a beautiful one at that."

"If you knew the crimes committed by this Woman in Black before she left the State," said Diamond Dick, "you would say that she merits death at the stake. She is beyond the pale of mercy; but if we can capture her, I will, with the consent of you gentlemen, deliver her to the authorities for trial. In the event of my death, I will state that there is a large amount of gold concealed in a small clump of cedars to the north-west of the point where we shall probably attack the Wild Cats. These cedars conceal a secret entrance to the cave, and more treasure may be found inside, not accessible from the main caverns."

"Better dismount, Dick," advised Square Sim. "There is a good saddle and bridle, which we took from one of the horses shot in the canyon. Don't talk about passing in your chips, for we can't spare such men as you."

Springing to the ground, Diamond Dick saddled and bridled his horse and then mounted, refusing, in his impatience, to wait for refreshments. Merely drinking a cup of coffee, as did Bill, both being already mounted, they started off down the south trail, scarce twenty minutes after they had arrived in the camp of the citizens, and galloped up the canyon toward the basin; the sky being here and there scattered with wind clouds, which promised, as there was a bright full moon, to make their movements more secure from observation.

Bowlder Bill volunteered as advance scout, and Dick was consequently under the necessity of remaining, as guide, with the citizens; the latter, agreeable to a motion or proposal from Square Sim, electing our hero leader or captain, in the expected contest.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VICTORY OR DEATH.

WHEN within two rifle-shots of the opening where Dick had discovered the horses of the bandits, the citizens were ordered to halt, and four men were directed to keep watch over the animals of the outlaws, and prevent an escape from that direction. Four others were sent to the secret entrance; these last with orders to take Captain Halfhand alive if possible, and also the Woman in Black, should she attempt in that way to leave the cave.

The horses of the citizens were then secured within a dense motte of pines, and two men detailed to guard them. Then, led by Diamond Dick, they stole forward, and soon reached a point where the shouts of the Wild Cats, who still kept up their drunken orgies, could be distinctly heard. The citizens were soon upon the thicket fringed bank of the basin, from which they could see the wild and lawless crew.

Over thirty of the bandits were gathered around the fires eating and drinking, their songs and oaths filling the air, and seeming to be utterly indifferent as to the attention they might attract.

Many of the citizens were in favor of pouring a volley into the midst of the gang, but Dick was averse to such a proceeding, pronouncing it to be unfair and cowardly. He advocated an advance down the gradual slope, which was covered with bushes; and then, breaking cover, with their rifles at ready, to call upon the Wild Cats to throw up hands and surrender.

If they did not obey on the instant, then he pro-

mised to give the order to fire, after which all should draw their revolvers, and carry the camp at a six-shooter charge. All agreed to adopt Dick's plan; but, before they started, a succession of unearthly shrieks in their rear drew the attention of the bandits, who sprang at once to their feet in apprehension of coming danger.

It was now quite late, and the moon was at times obscured by drifting clouds. The citizens noticed that, to their left there was a gully that led directly into the basin within which were the Wild Cats; and, as the strange yells sounded nearer, they decided that they proceeded from this ravine. Both they and the outlaws now stood, in anxious expectancy of what might be coming.

Out from the branches that arched the little passage bounded a foam and blood-flecked steed, its eyes glaring wildly as it snorted in terror and sprang rapidly and madly forward.

Upon the horse sat Jim Jams.

He was without a hat. His hair was flying behind him in the wind created by his great speed. Blood was flowing from the wounds he had received when he sprang in fright among the rocks, to hide from the grizzly bear. His horse dashed unguided, there being neither saddle, bridle, nor rope upon him.

Jim Jams, as he thus bounded into the basin, yelling like a fiend, and holding his knife above his head, presented a sight that was horrible to witness, and which caused the Wild Cats to spring right and left to avoid being trampled upon by the frenzied horse that galloped on like an arrow shot from a bow, directly through the camp, then up the incline, disappearing in the scattered pines and cacti.

While the bandits stood staring after him in utter amazement, a low whistle from Diamond Dick called the citizens to action, and all at a gesture from their leader stole in a line down the declivity, through the bushes, springing from the same to the open basin bed, and bringing their rifles to their shoulders.

The Wild Cats were all facing the opposite way; when, out on the night air, rung the words in stern command:

"Hands up! Surrender to the Sheriff of Big Medicine City!"

Thus yelled Diamond Dick, in a voice that meant business, but every bandit seemed suddenly to have lost the power of motion.

Then came the words from the outlaw ranks, in a voice of desperate energy:

"Use your teeth and claws, Cats, or die by the rope!"

A wild, taunting yell burst from the bandits, as they grasped at their revolvers; but to many it was the last cry they ever uttered, for a score of rifles belched fire as one, and a leaden hail hurtled through the horde, dropping many to earth, with weapons half-cocked in their hands.

Throwing aside their rifles, the citizens drew revolvers, and rushed toward the Wild Cats, firing as they ran, and soon the basin was a scene of fierce hand to hand fighting; the living struggling together, and stumbling over the dead and dying.

A rattle of revolver shots filled the air for a moment or two, subsiding to a few scattered reports mingled with shrieks of agony; then the citizens stood masters of the field, although six of their number lay dead, and several more were severely wounded.

Directing those who were unhurt to attend to the wounded, and signaling the horse-guard to lead in the stock, Diamond Dick and Square Sim, proceeded to the cave to make a thorough inspection of the same and search for Captain Halfhand and the Woman in Black, neither of whom had been seen. The search, however, as the reader knows, was fruitless; but the gold and jewels were secured, and the guard left at each entrance while the dead and wounded were conveyed upon horses to Big Medicine City.

Great was the surprise and disappointment of all, but especially of Dick, when they were forced to the conclusion that both the leaders had escaped.

All were greatly concerned too, in regard to the safety of Dashing Dolores and Big Medicine, neither of whom had been seen; and fear was expressed that the Kioway, when he left the secret passage, had been shot down by the sentinels who were on the watch.

"How about Jim Jams?" asked Dick. "Where has he been, and how came he in possession of that horse?"

"That was my mare," said the Sheriff. "She strayed from the burg a week ago. Jim Jams, I suppose, drank all the whisky, and then lay down somewhere to sleep, and awoke wild with delirium. He's got the 'jim-jams' again. This is the third time, and I reckon he'll pass 'over the range' this trip."

"Poor fellow!" said Dick. "Will not the mare circle toward the town?"

"She'll be apt to make for home when she gets into open ground. You can count on her taking Jim Jams into the burg, if he holds his gripe."

"How about the wounded bandits?" asked Dick.

"There are not many of them who will bother us. Our boys shot to kill, and didn't fall wide of the mark at any time. It is strange that both the parties you were so anxious to capture have escaped."

"I'll have them yet," said the young man, "if I have to search from here to the Pacific!"

"We'll scour the country to-morrow," said the sheriff.

As they two were thus conversing they had ridden down the canyon, and as they entered the big basin they were surprised and delighted to see their red friend mounted. The Kioway was standing upon the south bank, and he and his animal were outlined against the sky.

As they urged the horses up the bank, the Indian turned and headed southward, going slowly over the open plain.

"Hold up, my red friend!" Dick called out to him. "Have you seen Captain Halfhand, or the Squaw Chief, as you call her?"

The Kioway halted for a moment, and then pointed south, uttering but a single word—"Come!"

Positive that something extraordinary had occurred, or Big Medicine would not act so strangely, Square Sim requested Dick to refrain from further questions, and follow the Indian, feeling confident that the latter would give no explanation.

An unaccountable presentiment of some dread experience yet to come—born of the singular manner of the Kioway and the course he was traveling—caused them to gaze out over the prairie to the southward whenever the moon shone out clear from the drifting clouds.

Had they known what a horrible sight was to be seen upon the plain but a short distance ahead, they would have been chilled to the very heart.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEMESIS.

THE blood-red sun sunk below the horizon, and left a twilight gloom. The moon, skulking behind the shifting clouds, seemed loth to cast her pure silvery rays down upon the heads that projected above the level plain.

Heads that were blood-stained and begrimed with earth. Faces that were drawn with the most deathly anguish, agony, thirst and despair. Eyes that glared into each other with a horrid stare. Lips that were parched and cracked.

To describe the terror of Captain Halfhand, as he recovered consciousness and found himself thus, would be beyond the power of pen or tongue. He was at first unable to comprehend his situation, but when his gaze fell upon Reckless Rube but a few feet from him, the dread truth was brought home to him at once.

The lips of the sufferer in front of him kept moving, and Halfhand strove to catch the words which they formed, but naught except a ghastly whisper caught his ear. Then, perceiving that the man had become a maniac, the bandit chief, filled with frenzy, uttered shriek after shriek, prayed, cursed, and laughed in insane glee, his brain almost bursting with the pressure of horrors.

Thus time passed, and the moon, now and then bursting free from the clouds, showed plainly the heads of the two outlaws and the carcass of the dead horse, upon which were perched a pair of buzzards.

As time advanced, the short, sharp yelping of numberless coyotes sounded on all sides. Soon these cowardly sneak wolves came up, and the buzzards drew off and stood motionless on the prairie.

One or two of the coyotes, bolder than the others, sprang forward upon the dead horse and buried their teeth in the flesh, and the next moment a hundred more were snarling and fighting, a mingled mass of yelping brutes covering the carcass for which they struggled from view.

Suddenly these sounds, too, were hushed; for sharp and loud came the howl of the "loafer" or black wolf of the llanos, and the coyotes sneaked away. Then the huge black wolves, with their red tongues, glittering fangs and fiery eyes, flew through the air in long searching bounds, and sprang upon the dead steed. One of these, spying the human heads, crouched near them and cast its fiery, rolling eyes upon the face of the bandit chief, who, having now an interval of sanity, was filled with a dread more terrible than any he had yet felt.

The ferocious beast gathered its form, as if to spring forward upon this newly-discovered prey, but a loud and piercing cry caused even the savage wolf to draw off in evident fear and perplexity.

Like an echo to this shriek, there now sounded over the plain a prolonged yell which appeared to reach even the ears of Reckless Rube; for his head bobbed from side to side, and his eyes changed at once from their death-like stare.

Then he listened and at last the sound of a horse galloping over the prairie struck his ear, crushing down the faint hope that had flashed upon his tortured brain.

Nearer and nearer came the night rider, and the wolves walked off sullenly over the plain, and stood with their fierce eyes fixed upon the approaching horse.

As the steed came nearer, Captain Halfhand gave a loud yell; but, urged on, the horse sprang within a few feet of him before coming to a halt. Then Dashing Dolores, with a bound, sprang to the earth, and drew Lucile Luzerne after her. With a scream of triumph, she laid the Woman in Black upon the ground—the face of the latter near to that of Captain Halfhand—the one, a semi-maniac, buried to the neck in the earth; the other, bound hand and foot, scorched, blistered and blackened, and shuddering with a dread of horror, in comparison with which death or insanity would be a relief.

With frantic haste, Dolores secured her horse, and proceeded to dig a hole near at hand, meanwhile laughing and talking in insane glee, as the moans of the Wild Cat Queen reached her ears.

In time the cavity was of sufficient depth, and Dolores dragged the Woman in Black toward it, and then into it, filling in the earth, glancing, when she had ended, from one to the other with great satisfaction.

Lucile Luzerne, paralyzed with horror, was unable to struggle during the fearful proceeding; but she fully comprehended the terrible fate to which she was doomed. Glancing at the agony-racked features of Reckless Rube, whom she recognized, she thought of her own sufferings yet to come, and then, appalled at the thought of the dread torture she must undergo, with the eyes of her companions in crime filming in death before her, she shrieked until her swollen tongue refused to articulate, and then, gasping for breath, she sunk into insensibility.

All at once, Dolores seemed to realize that she had accomplished all she had intended, and even more than filled the bill. Her revenge was complete. She had avenged her own wrongs, and the dastardly murder of her child. Rube Reynolds could not escape the fate to which she had doomed him. She had also condemned to death the woman who had presumed to come between her and Diamond Dick. She now pressed her hands to her hot throbbing temples, and tried to calm the mad whirl of her brain, while she gazed at the head of the bandit chief.

Quickly she seized upon the thought, born of the knowledge that Dick was on the trail of the Wild Cat leader, that the dashing dandy from Denver was the one who had captured him, and in her absence buried him by the side of Reckless Rube. No sooner did this occur to her, in an interval of partial sanity, than it brought all her mad love in a wild surge back to her heart, crushing down all other thoughts and

feelings; and Dolores jerked the picket-pin loose from the earth, sprung upon her horse, and again returned to the basin in search of Diamond Dick.

About the same time that Dolores urged her horse away from the terrible triangle of heads, the horse ridden by poor Jim Jams, after galloping away from the vicinity of the Wild Cats, had reached by many by-paths and crooked ways the level plain, and sped over it, Jim Jams clinging with desperation to the mane of the poor beast, and being weakened by the loss of blood, was from the same cause somewhat relieved from the mania caused by drink.

It was then, or nearly then, also, that Diamond Dick and Square Sim left the big basin and started over the plain under the guidance of Big Medicine, for a purpose they could not fully understand.

The Kioway, after burying Captain Halfhand, had galloped toward the south trail, to lead the citizens to the bandit retreat; but, observing Jim Jams afar off amid the foot-hills, he had traveled many miles in pursuit, knowing by the actions of the poor fellow, and his tortuous course, that he was insane from drink. This had prevented the Indian from joining in the fight, and after Jim Jams had taken to the canyon, Big Medicine, his horse being fagged, had halted; then, afterward, as he discovered the approach of Dick and Sim, he decided to show the former that he had done all in his power to serve his white friend, by burying his enemy alive in the plain.

This, then, was now the position of the parties in whom we are most interested.

Dolores, galloping toward the range, north; Jim Jams speeding from the north-west, directly with the wind, toward the fearful place of interment on the plain; and Big Medicine guiding Dick and Sim to the same point, approaching the triangle of death from the north-east.

A thin cloud at this time somewhat obscured the moon, and prevented the different persons we have mentioned from discovering each other; but the darkness was destined to be soon changed to a far brighter light than that cast by the silvery moon, for the horse of Jim Jams, frightened by a wolf, sheered to one side so quickly that the rider was thrown to the earth. Jim Jams, thus finding himself in the darkness and without a horse, fumbled in his pouch for a match, and striking a light on the sole of his boot, ignited the grass, which was dry as tinder, and the next moment the flames spread, and rushed like a race-horse in the direction of the tortured, half-buried wretches on the plain!

As the wall of fire lit up the sky and prairie, and the black smoke rolled in dense clouds upward, Dashing Dolores halted her steed, and then whirled him half around, the flames seeming to make her furious; as, in her insane state, she fancied she was somehow at the last to be robbed of her revenge.

With a scream of madness, her horse frantic with terror, the poor girl dashed off wildly in the direction whence she came. Dick, Sim and the Kioway, observing this, endeavored to attract her attention, but in vain. She soon reached the spot, sprung from her steed, which bounded wildly away, and stood by the trio of heads facing the coming flames in a defiant manner, while the shrieks of Halfhand and Lucile, both of whom had recovered their senses, filled the night air.

Suffering untold horrors from her previous burns, Lucile Luzerne screamed loudly, and then, with a gurgling cry, closed her eyes.

"Big Medicine, what means this? Where are you leading us, and why is Dolores exposing herself to death?"

Thus shouted Diamond Dick as he spurred up to the Kioway and caught him by the arm.

"Chief of bad white men, he bury in plain, all but head. Man what ride fast in burg, he bury too. Dolores she put Rube in hole. Big Medicine, he put Halfhand in hole."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Square Sim, who had heard the loud-shouted words of the Indian. "They will die a most terrible death. There is no help for them; and poor Dolores has lost her wits. Come! spur back, Dick, or we, too, are lost!"

"Back! What mean you? I shall save the poor girl, or die in the attempt!"

CHAPTER XXX.

TERRIBLY AVENGED.

"I SHALL save the poor girl, or die in the attempt!"

Thus yelled Diamond Dick, as he drove spurs to his steed, and the noble animal flew like the wind toward the wall of rushing, blinding, roaring flames.

Square Sim and Big Medicine turned their horses, knowing that the poor beasts were fagged, and could not save them unless by a miracle, and galloped on the back trail, belaboring the animals with their rifles, and with little hope that Dick could save Dolores, though his black steed was as fleet as the wind.

At this moment three reports were heard from a revolver, sounding above the hissing of the flames, and they saw the fearless girl, as she stood facing the fast advancing wall of fire, and not fifty paces from it; the lurid light shining vividly upon her beautiful form and face, and the fast falling showers of cinders filling the air above and around her.

She seemed to hear the approach of Dick's horse as he dashed to her side, but she moved not.

An instant stood she thus; the next Dick had seized her by her belt, drew her upward, and held her fast in his arms, leaving the noble steed unguided, to fly eastward away from the fearful flames.

Just escaping the north end of the wall of fire, by their horses plunging down the bank into the basin, Square Sim and Big Medicine hurried to the east side, filled with the worst apprehensions in regard to Diamond Dick and Dolores; but, to their great joy, they soon saw the gallant black, which, cut off from safety by a retreat to the basin, was now flying like a leaf before the gale, with his precious double load, toward the point where the south trail led from the plain down into the canyon, the only avenue of safety, and which they saw by the speed kept up by the horse, would be reached.

Galloping down the canyon, Square Sim and the Kioway found most of the citizens who had been engaged in the recent fight with the Wild Cats, and who had halted here, being greatly alarmed by the lurid light to the west.

Soon Diamond Dick appeared, riding slowly and sadly down the south trail, the loud welcoming cries of the citizens being unnoticed by the dandy from Denver, who bore in his arms the apparently senseless form of Dashing Dolores.

As Dick reached the bed of the canyon, the citizens crowded around him, but he cried out in a voice, mournful in its pathos:

"She is dead, gentlemen—poor Dashing Dolores is dead! Her life ended when her revenge was accomplished. She died in my arms, as we galloped away from the flames—died with a smile on her lips. I heard her say, 'Pretty boy! I'm coming, baby; mamma's coming!' Lay her gently on the grass, boys. Big Medicine, how many were buried in the plain?"

The Indian held up two fingers.

"There were three heads," said Dick. "Who is the third? Come, Square Sim; change horses, and we will return by the canyon, and solve the mystery. The ground will be safe to cross by the time we reach the basin. They did not feel the fire, for Dolores sent a bullet through each head before I reached her side."

"I am glad to know it," said Sim, much relieved, as he mounted a fresh horse. "I would not want to condemn a mad dog to such a death. Big Medicine will explain everything to you."

Dick and Square Sim spurred up the canyon, and over the black, smoking plain, soon reaching the spot marked by three black objects, so lately boiling over with the mad passions of life, but now senseless and filling the air with the sickening odor of scorched hair and flesh. Both men proceeded to remove the earth from about the bodies with their knives, as the only way of ascertaining the identity of the third mysterious victim.

In a few moments Diamond Dick sprung upright with a cry of horror that caused Sim to drop his knife and cry out also:

"Who is it, Dick?"

"Lucile Luzerne! The Woman in Black—the Queen of the Wild Cats!"

"Merciful Heavens! How came she here?"

"Ask the moon! It is a mystery, and always will be, I suppose."

"I think I can solve it," said the sheriff.

"You can? Well, proceed."

"Dashing Dolores was insanely jealous of that woman. She saw her stand between you and death, and being madly in love with you—as we of Big Medicine City who knew her so well, could see—in her passion, after burying Reckless Rube, conceived the idea of avenging herself there also, also by capturing and burying the Woman in Black. Dolores, poor child, had her insane spells at times, often wandering from her cabin to the mountains; and, since the time of Rube's appearance in the street of the burg, she has been as mad as a March hare!"

As Square Sim ceased, another loud cry sounded over the plain from the north, and soon came moving toward them, a blackened object having the semblance of humanity, but acting more like a beast than a human being. It came, crawling, walking and leaping alternately, and at length reached the vicinity of Dick and Sim, when the nondescript seemed suddenly to discover and recognize them, although apparently doubting a favorable welcome. Sinking upon the blackened earth, it cast a distrustful glance, first upon one, and then the other of the observers.

"By the royal King of Denmark!" exclaimed Dick, in surprise and relief; "if that isn't Jim Jams! But his own mother would kick him out of the doorway for an incendiary tramp. I would never have known him, except for a thought that flashed through my mind in regard to his disappearance, having connected him in some way—most unreasonably, I admit—with this burial; and then a peculiar movement of his decided his identity. But isn't he in a most miserable plight though?"

"You are right, Dick. That is Jim Jams, sure as fate. Poor fellow! He has had a rough trail of it, to judge from his present appearance, since he left Big Medicine City!"

As the sheriff spoke, Dick went up and lifted the poor inebriate to his feet.

"Come, Jim Jams, old boy," he said, "brace up! We'll take you back safe to Placer Palace. Say! where in the name of wonder have you been?"

Not a word, however, could they extort from Jim Jams. He was covered with soot from head to foot, his clothing was torn to shreds, and his face terribly scratched, while his hands were badly blistered from crawling over the sward.

"Come, Dick," said Jim, "I am sick of all these horrible sights and sounds. Let us hasten back to the burg. I hope never to be forced to go through such an experience in so short a time again. I'll send some of the boys up here to-morrow to bury the outlaws out of sight forever. Well, thank the Fates! New Mexico is freed from the murderous gang who called themselves the Wild Cats!"

"One moment!" said Dick; "I wish to make sure that this is really George Holbrook. I see you have loosened the earth about the body."

Stooping down, Diamond Dick cut the cords that bound the arms of the corpse, and raised the right arm, disclosing the black-gloved hand. Tearing the glove away, he uttered an exclamation of exultation and relief.

"Yes, it is he!" The fingers are all wanting; half the hand has been amputated, and that star in India ink on the wrist removes all doubt. Yegods! Justice has overtaken him. Look at that other! Sim! It is hard to believe that is all that is left of that beautiful face. That the light of those eyes that made strong men their slaves is quenched forever by the prairie fire. Truly a life of crime, such as hers, must eventually have a terrible ending."

"Come, Dick," said Square Sim; "enough of this. I am eager to get away from it all."

Jim Jams, who now acted like a little child, the tears running down his sooty cheeks, was assisted by Sim up behind Dick; and in a cloud of black dust they dashed toward the basin, and thence down the canyon, galloping in among the citizens who stared at their blackened faces and clothing, and still more at the third man, whom they thought must be the resurrected "mystery."

When matters were fully explained, and they found that the singular being was indeed Jim Jams, they each endeavored to make the poor fellow as

comfortable as was possible under the circumstances. Mounted upon one of the horses that had been captured from the Wild Cats, Jim was headed for the burg; while Diamond Dick once more on his noble steed, received the corpse of the still beautiful Dolores in his arms, and rode slowly toward Big Medicine City, the horse treading carefully, and at times bending his head around, his great expressive eyes filled with a mournful look, as if conscious that death had claimed the fair girl who had, only the previous night, petted him and whispered in his ears, with her arms clasped about his neck.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE QUIET AFTER THE STORM.

A SAD cavalcade entered Big Medicine City in the small hours of the morning.

The living cared for the wounded, and the dead were laid out in a vacant shanty; with the exception of poor Dolores, who was carried by Dick to her cabin at the foot of the range, and laid upon her own couch. Dick spread his blanket upon the sward at the door, and throwing himself upon it, soon fell into a death-like slumber.

Big Medicine seated himself near at hand, and the black horse cropped the grass, at times tossing up his head, with the long blades hanging from his closed jaws, and pricking his ears forward, gazed upon the recumbent form of his master, then at the Kioway, and then into the open door of the cabin, as if in deep thought over the sad and terrible events that had occurred since the previous day.

On the following morning, the dead were buried; the last resting-place of Dolores being selected by Dick, near her little home, and within an ever-sighing motto of pines.

Among the effects of the ill-fated girl, they found a marriage certificate, proving that she had been wedded to Reuben Reynolds in San Antonio, Texas; but a letter, written by a woman who claimed to have been joined to him in wedlock at Galveston some months previous to the date of the former, was a proof, if true, that the marriage of poor Dolores Martinez with Reynolds was illegal.

A diary kept by Dolores recorded the birth of a male infant, and also the fearful details of the strangling of the child by its own father, who afterward became known as Reckless Rube the bandit spy.

The murder—so the record stated—was committed before the eyes of the mother; she, Dolores, being then sick upon her bed. All this, joined to the many rambling words and threats of the poor girl, when attacked with insane fits, showed conclusively the strong motives she had for the vow of vengeance she had written down in her diary, and which she kept to the letter.

The citizens, as well as Dick and the Kioway, felt assured that Dolores had buried Reckless Rube, and the Woman in Black as well, as Big Medicine revealed the fact that when he thus disposed of Captain Halfhand, Lucile Luzerne was not there.

The caverns were searched and many valuables were obtained, in addition to the gold which the bandit chief had conveyed to the mouth of the secret entrance. There were, besides, Indian disguises, paint-bags and weapons, together with bullet-perforated and blood-stained uniforms of United States soldiers, being plain proof that a recent massacre of the teamsters and escort of a wagon-train near Taos, supposed to have been committed by Apaches, had really been the work of the Wild Cats, disguised as Indians.

The jewelry, such as was known to have been taken from passengers on the stage-line, was delivered by Square Sim to the authorities at Taos, and also such moneys as were proved to have been stolen from the express safes.

The remainder was divided equally among the citizens who had been engaged in cleaning out the Wild Cats; such of the relatives of the slain as could be found receiving the share of the same, and the unclaimed surplus being set aside for beautifying and caring for the cemetery of the little town.

A tasteful monument was ordered from Denver by Diamond Dick, to be placed over the grave of poor Dolores Martinez.

Within a week Jim Jams had recovered, and Dick gave him his share of the gold, which, with the handsome sum received as his own portion—the citizens deciding that he had accomplished more by giving the Wild Cats such a scare than if he had been in the midst of the fight—enabled him to purchase a herd of Texas cattle and establish a ranch down the range. He was effectually cured from his frightful vice, his dread experience aiding very much in Dick's effort to prevail upon him to "swear off" for all time. When he was sometimes tempted, a single thought of the grizzly bear, although the monster was mixed up in his mind with an imaginary menagerie that had been exhibited to him without price, and which stampeded with him in close company during his protracted ride among the foot-hills, was a sufficiently strong pull in the opposite direction to prevent his falling from grace.

Among other things found in the cave of the Wild Cats was a letter, directed to "George Holbrook, Taos, New Mexico," and post-marked "Ogdensburg, New York," by which it was learned that the bandit chief had sent a spy to his old home, where he had deserted his family and committed forgeries, at the instigation of Lucile Luzerne, which nearly brought about the ruin of James McClellan, whose wife was the sister of Katharine Holbrook, the murdered wife of the outlaw chief.

This letter informed Captain Halfhand that young McClellan had left Ogdensburg, with the avowed intention of hunting to his death the miscreant who had so basely wronged his own and others, and delivering Lucile Luzerne up to justice.

George McClellan, or Diamond Dick, as Jim Jams had named him, returned to his home in Ogdensburg, much to the regret of every one in Big Medicine City, taking the Kioway to the States along with him.

Great was the joy of parents, brothers, sister and the aged grandmother at his return, their joy being enhanced by the declaration of the young man to the effect that aunt Katharine and her little ones were avenged without his hands having been stained with the blood of the criminals.

THE END.

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